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THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

"THE SCHOOLMASTER AND HIS COMPANION LOOKED STEADILY AT EACH OTHER FOR A FEW SECONDS, AND THEN EXCHANGED A VERY MEANING SMILE."—P. 18.

THE

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH FIFTY-NINE ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. BARNARD

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PREFACE.

THIS story was begun within a few months after the publication of the completed "Pickwick Papers." There were, then, a good many cheap Yorkshire schools in existence. There are very few now.

Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere; although preparation for the functions he undertook was required in the surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it; in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker; the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted; and although schoolmasters, as a race, were the blockheads and impostors who might naturally be expected to spring from such a state of things, and to flourish in it; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have intrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy corner-stone of a structure which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded *laissez-aller* neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world.

We hear sometimes of an action for damages against the unqualified medical practitioner, who has deformed a broken limb in pretending to heal it. But what of the hundreds of thousands of minds that have been deformed for ever by the incapable pettifoggers who have pretended to form them?

I make mention of the race, as of the Yorkshire schoolmasters, in the past tense. Though it has not yet finally disappeared, it is dwindling daily. A long day's work remains to be done about us in the way of education, Heaven knows; but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one have been furnished of late years.

I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child sitting in by-places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of PARTRIDGE, STRAP, TOM PIPES, and SANCHO PANZA; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend having ripped it open with an inky penknife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about Yorkshire schools—fell, long afterwards and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them—at last, having an audience, resolved to write about them.

With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter-time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was

forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the "Pickwick Papers," I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connection, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and, if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood the schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. Was there any large school near? I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes!" he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anoother; that was a' a matther of opinion;" and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing, he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable. At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat, and, leaning over the table and looking me full in the face, said, in a low voice: "Weel, misther, we've been vara pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak' my moind tiv 'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yan o' our schoolmeasthers, while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in. Ar wouldn't mak' ill words amang my neeburs, and ar speak tiv 'ee quiet loike. But I'm dom'd if ar can gang to bed and not tell 'ee, for weedur's sak', to keep the lattle boy from a' sike scoondrels while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in!" Repeating these words with great heartiness, and with a solemnity on his jolly face that made it look twice as large as before, he shook hands and went away. I never saw him afterwards, but I sometimes imagine that I descry a faint reflection of him in John Browdie.

In reference to these gentry, I may here quote a few words from the original Preface to this book.

"It has afforded the Author great amusement and satisfaction, during the progress of this work, to learn, from country friends and from a variety of ludicrous statements concerning himself in provincial newspapers, that more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One worthy, he has reason to believe, has actually consulted authorities learned in the law, as to his having good grounds on which to rest an action for libel; another has meditated a journey to London, for the express purpose of committing an assault and battery on his traducer; a third perfectly remembers being waited on, last January twelvemonth, by two gentlemen, one of whom held him in conversation while the other took his likeness; and, although Mr. Squeers has but one eye, and he has two, and the published sketch does not resemble him (whoever he may be) in any other respect, still he and all his friends and neighbours know at once for whom it is meant, because—the character is *so* like him.

"While the Author cannot but feel the full force of the compliment thus conveyed to him, he ventures to suggest that these contentions may arise from the fact that Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual. Where imposture, ignorance, and brutal

cupidity are the stock-in-trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognise something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own.

"The Author's object in calling public attention to the system would be very imperfectly fulfilled if he did not state now, in his own person, emphatically and earnestly, that Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible. That there are upon record trials at law in which damages have been sought as a poor recompense for lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master in these places, involving such offensive and foul details of neglect, cruelty, and disease as no writer of fiction would have the boldness to imagine. And that, since he has been engaged upon these Adventures, he has received, from private quarters far beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust, accounts of atrocities, in the perpetration of which upon neglected or repudiated children these schools have been the main instruments, very far exceeding any that appear in these pages."

This comprises all I need say on the subject; except that if I had seen occasion, I had resolved to reprint a few of these details of legal proceedings from certain old newspapers.

One other quotation from the same Preface may serve to introduce a fact that my readers may think curious.

"To turn to a more pleasant subject, it may be right to say that there *are* two characters in this book which are drawn from life. It is remarkable that what we call the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary; and that while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability. But those who take an interest in this tale will be glad to learn that the BROTHERS CHEERYBLE live; that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature, and their unbounded benevolence are no creations of the Author's brain; but are prompting every day (and oftenest by stealth) some munificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honour."

If I were to attempt to sum up the thousands of letters, from all sorts of people in all sorts of latitudes and climates, which this unlucky paragraph brought down upon me, I should get into an arithmetical difficulty from which I could not easily extricate myself. Suffice it to say, that I believe the applications for loans, gifts, and offices of profit, that I have been requested to forward to the originals of the BROTHERS CHEERYBLE (with whom I never interchanged any communication in my life), would have exhausted the combined patronage of all the Lord Chancellors since the accession of the House of Brunswick, and would have broken the Rest of the Bank of England.

The Brothers are now dead.

There is only one other point on which I would desire to offer a remark. If Nicholas be not always found to be blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper, and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Introduces all the Rest	1
II.	Of Mr. Ralph Nickleby, and his Establishment, and his Undertakings. And of a great Joint-Stock Company of vast National Importance	4
III.	Mr. Ralph Nickleby receives sad Tidings of his Brother, but bears up nobly against the Intelligence communicated to him. The Reader is informed how he liked Nicholas, who is herein introduced, and how kindly he proposed to make his Fortune at once	9
IV.	Nicholas and his Uncle (to secure the Fortune without loss of Time) wait upon Mr. Wackford Squeers, the Yorkshire Schoolmaster	15
V.	Nicholas starts for Yorkshire. Of his Leave-taking and his Fellow-travellers, and what befell them on the Road	22
VI.	In which the Occurrence of the Accident mentioned in the last Chapter, affords an Opportunity to a Couple of Gentlemen to tell Stories against each other	28
VII.	Mr. and Mrs. Squeers at Home	39
VIII.	Of the Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall	43
IX.	Of Miss Squeers, Mrs. Squeers, Master Squeers, and Mr. Squeers; and of various Matters and Persons connected no less with the Squeerses than with Nicholas Nickleby	50
X.	How Mr. Ralph Nickleby provided for his Niece and Sister-in-law	59
XI.	Newman Noggs inducts Mrs. and Miss Nickleby into their new Dwelling in the City	65
XII.	Whereby the Reader will be enabled to trace the further Course of Miss Fanny Squeers's Love, and to ascertain whether it ran smooth or otherwise	68
XIII.	Nicholas varies the Monotony of Dotheboys Hall by a most vigorous and remarkable Proceeding, which leads to Consequences of some Importance	74
XIV.	Having the Misfortune to treat of none but Common People, is necessarily of a Mean and Vulgar Character	81
XV.	Acquaints the Reader with the Cause and Origin of the Interruption described in the last Chapter, and with some other Matters necessary to be known	87
XVI.	Nicholas seeks to employ himself in a New Capacity, and, being unsuccessful, accepts an Engagement as Tutor in a Private Family	93
XVII.	Follows the Fortunes of Miss Nickleby	104
XVIII.	Miss Knag, after doting on Kate Nickleby for three whole Days, makes up her Mind to hate her for evermore. The Causes which led Miss Knag to form this Resolution	109
XIX.	Descriptive of a Dinner at Mr. Ralph Nickleby's, and of the Manner in which the Company entertained themselves, before Dinner, at Dinner, and after Dinner	116
XX.	Wherein Nicholas at length encounters his Uncle, to whom he expresses his Sentiments with much Candour. His Resolution	125
XXI.	Madame Mantalini finds herself in a Situation of some Difficulty, and Miss Nickleby finds herself in no Situation at all	130
XXII.	Nicholas, accompanied by Smike, sallies forth to seek his Fortune. He encounters Mr. Vincent Crummles; and who he was is herein made manifest	137
XXIII.	Treats of the Company of Mr. Vincent Crummles, and of his Affairs, Domestic and Theatrical	145
XXIV.	Of the Great Bespeak for Miss Snevellicci, and the first Appearance of Nicholas upon any Stage	152
XXV.	Concerning a young Lady from London, who joins the Company, and an elderly Admirer who follows in her Train; with an affecting Ceremony consequent on their Arrival	160
XXVI.	Is fraught with some Danger to Miss Nickleby's Peace of Mind	167
XXVII.	Mrs. Nickleby becomes acquainted with Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, whose Affection and Interest are beyond all Bounds	173
XXVIII.	Miss Nickleby, rendered desperate by the Persecution of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and the complicated Difficulties and Distresses which surround her, appeals, as a last Resource, to her Uncle for Protection	180
XXIX.	Of the Proceedings of Nicholas, and certain Internal Divisions in the Company of Mr. Vincent Crummles	189
XXX.	Festivities are held in Honour of Nicholas, who suddenly withdraws himself from the Society of Mr. Vincent Crummles and his Theatrical Companions	194

CHAP. PAGE

XXXI.—Of Ralph Nickleby and Newman Noggs, and some wise Precautions, the Success or Failure of which will appear in the Sequel . . . 202

XXXII.—Relating chiefly to some remarkable Conversation, and some remarkable Proceedings to which it gives rise . 206

XXXIII.—In which Mr. Ralph Nickleby is relieved, by a very expeditious Process, from all Commerce with his Relations 211

XXXIV.—Wherein Mr. Ralph Nickleby is visited by Persons with whom the Reader has been already made acquainted 215

XXXV.—Smike becomes known to Mrs. Nickleby and Kate. Nicholas also meets with new Acquaintances, and brighter Days seem to dawn upon the Family 223

XXXVI.—Private and confidential; relating to Family Matters. Showing how Mr. Kenwigs underwent violent Agitation, and how Mrs. Kenwigs was as well as could be expected . . 232

XXXVII.—Nicholas finds further Favour in the Eyes of the Brothers Cheeryble and Mr. Timothy Linkinwater. The Brothers give a Banquet on a great Annual Occasion. Nicholas, on returning Home from it, receives a mysterious and important Disclosure from the Lips of Mrs. Nickleby 237

XXXVIII.—Comprises certain Particulars arising out of a Visit of Condolence, which may prove important hereafter. Smike unexpectedly encounters a very old Friend, who invites him to his House, and will take no Denial 245

XXXIX.—In which another old Friend encounters Smike, very opportunely and to some Purpose 253

XL.—In which Nicholas falls in Love. He employs a Mediator, whose Proceedings are crowned with unexpected Success, excepting in one solitary Particular 258

XLI.—Containing some Romantic Passages between Mrs. Nickleby and the Gentleman in the Small-clothes next Door 266

XLII.—Illustrative of the convivial Sentiment, that the best of Friends must sometimes part 273

XLIII.—Officiates as a Kind of Gentleman Usher, in bringing various People together 279

XLIV.—Mr. Ralph Nickleby cuts an old Acquaintance. It would also appear, from the Contents hereof, that a Joke, even between Husband and Wife, may be sometimes carried too far 286

CHAP. PAGE

XLV.—Containing Matter of a surprising Kind 294

XLVI.—Throws some Light upon Nicholas's Love; but whether for Good or Evil the Reader must determine . . 301

XLVII.—Mr. Ralph Nickleby has some confidential Intercourse with another old Friend. They concert between them a Project which promises well for both 308

XLVIII.—Being for the Benefit of Mr. Vincent Crummles, and positively his last Appearance on this Stage . . 316

XLIX.—Chronicles the further Proceedings of the Nickleby Family, and the Sequel of the Adventure of the Gentleman in the Small-clothes 322

L.—Involves a serious Catastrophe . . 330

LI.—The Project of Mr. Ralph Nickleby and his Friend, approaching a successful Issue, becomes unexpectedly known to another Party not admitted into their Confidence 337

LII.—Nicholas despairs of rescuing Madeline Bray, but plucks up his Spirits again, and determines to attempt it. Domestic Intelligence of the Kenwigses and Lillyvicks 343

LIII.—Containing the further Progress of the Plot contrived by Mr. Ralph Nickleby and Mr. Arthur Gride 349

LIV.—The Crisis of the Project, and its Result 359

LV.—Of Family Matters, Cares, Hopes, Disappointments, and Sorrows . . 365

LVI.—Ralph Nickleby, baffled by his Nephew in his late Design, hatches a Scheme of Retaliation which Accident suggests to him, and takes into his Counsels a tried Auxiliary . . . 371

LVII.—How Ralph Nickleby's Auxiliary went about his Work, and how he prospered with it 377

LVIII.—In which one Scene of this History is closed 383

LIX.—The Plots begin to fail, and Doubts and Dangers to disturb the Plotter . . 386

LX.—The Dangers thicken, and the Worst is told 394

LXI.—Wherein Nicholas and his Sister forfeit the good Opinion of all worldly and prudent People 400

LXII.—Ralph makes one last Appointment—and keeps it 405

LXIII.—The Brothers Cheeryble make various Declarations for themselves and others. Tim Linkinwater makes a Declaration for himself . . . 407

LXIV.—An old Acquaintance is recognised under melancholy Circumstances, and Dotheboys Hall breaks up for ever 414

LXV.—Conclusion 419

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

"THE SCHOOLMASTER AND HIS COMPANION LOOKED STEADILY AT EACH OTHER FOR A FEW SECONDS, AND THEN EXCHANGED A VERY MEANING SMILE" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"YOU CAN JIST GIVE HIM THAT 'ERE CARD, AND TELL HIM IF HE WANTS TO SPEAK TO ME, AND SAVE TROUBLE, HERE I AM; THAT'S ALL" . . . . . *To face page* 132

"SIR MULBERRY, SHORTENING HIS WHIP, APPLIED IT FURIOUSLY TO THE HEAD AND SHOULDERS OF NICHOLAS. IT WAS BROKEN IN THE STRUGGLE; NICHOLAS GAINED THE HEAVY HANDLE, AND WITH IT LAID OPEN ONE SIDE OF HIS ANTAGONIST'S FACE FROM THE EYE TO THE LIP" . . 211

"ALL THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF DAY CAME ON; AND AMIDST IT ALL, AND PRESSING DOWN THE GRASS WHOSE EVERY BLADE BORE TWENTY TINY LIVES, LAY THE DEAD MAN, WITH HIS STARK AND RIGID FACE TURNED UPWARDS TO THE SKY" 337

"RALPH MAKES ONE LAST APPOINTMENT—AND KEEPS IT" 406

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT.

	PAGE
Vignette.	
Ralph Nickleby and Newman Noggs	1
"The uncle and nephew looked at each other for some seconds without speaking"	13
"Snubs and Romans are plentiful enough, and there are flats of all sorts and sizes when there's a meeting at Exeter Hall"	21
"Very glad to make your acquaintance, miss," said Squeers, raising his hat an inch or two	25
"On the opposite side of the fire, there sat with folded arms a wrinkled hideous figure"	37
The First Class in English Spelling and Philosophy	45
"Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope!"	49
"Oh! as soft as possible, if you please"	53
"Kate walked sadly back to their lodgings in the Strand"	68
"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you"	80
"I can—not help it, and it don't signify," sobbed Mrs. Kenwigs. "Oh! they're too beautiful to live, much too beautiful!"	85
"There came into the office an applicant, in whose favour he immediately retired, and whose appearance both surprised and interested him"	96
"I don't forget you, my soul, and never shall, and never can,' said Mantalini, kissing his wife's hand, and grimacing aside to Miss Nickleby, who turned' away	108
"A miserable wretch," exclaimed Mr. Knag, striking his forehead. "A miserable wretch"	113
"I am afraid you have been giving her some of your wicked looks, my lord," said the intended	117
"But the young lady making a violent effort to disengage herself, he lost his balance, and measured his length upon the ground"	124
"The dressing-room door being hastily flung open, Mr. Mantalini was disclosed to view, with his shirt collar symmetrically thrown back: putting a fine edge to a breakfast knife by means of his razor strop"	133
"Mr. Crummles looked, from time to time, with great interest at Smike, with whom he had appeared considerably struck from the first. He had now fallen asleep, and was nodding in his chair"	144
The Indian Savage and the Maiden	148
"As an exquisite embodiment of the poet's visions, and a realisation of human intellectuality, gilding with refulgent light our dreamy moments, and laying open a new and magic world before the mental eye, the drama is gone, perfectly gone," said Mr. Curdle	157
"Nickleby," said his client, throwing himself along the sofa on which he had been previously seated, so as to bring his lips nearer to the old man's ear, "what a pretty creature your niece is!"	169
"Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend exchanged glances over the top of the bonnet"	172

PAGE

"I see how it is," said poor Noggs, drawing from his pocket what seemed to be a very old duster, and wiping Kate's eyes with it as gently as if she were an infant 188

"But they shall not protect ye!" said the tragedian, taking an upward look at Nicholas, beginning at his boots and ending at the crown of his head, &c. 192

"Mr. Snevellicci repeated the wink, and, drinking to Mrs. Lillyvick in dumb-show, actually blew her a kiss" 200

"Lashing himself up to an extravagant pitch of fury, Newman Noggs jerked himself about the room with the most eccentric motion ever beheld in a human being" 205

"Look at them tears, sir," said Squeers with a triumphant air, as Master Wackford wiped his eyes with the cuff of his jacket; "there's oiliness!" 220

"Night found him, at last, still harping on the same theme, and still pursuing the same unprofitable reflections" 224

"I'm not coming an hour later in the morning, you know," said Tim, breaking out all at once, and looking very resolute. "I'm not going to sleep in the fresh air—no, nor I'm not going into the country either," &c. 232

"With this the doctor laughed; but he didn't laugh half as much as a married friend of Mrs. Kenwigs's, who had just come in from the sick chamber," &c. 236

"Ye-es," said the other, turning full upon him. "If you had told him who you were; if you had given him your card, and found out, afterwards, that his station or character prevented your fighting him, it would have been bad enough then" 249

"Darting in, covered Smike's mouth with his huge hand before he could utter a sound" . 257

The Meditative Ogre 264

"Concluded by standing on one leg, and repeating his favourite bellow with increased vehemence" 272

"I say," said John, rather astounded for the moment, "mak' theeself quite at whoam, will 'ee?" 277

"Fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief" . 288

"I am a most miserable and wretched outcast, nearly sixty years old, and as destitute and helpless as a child of six" 293

PAGE

Mr. Squeers executes an impromptu Pas Seul . 301

"No matter! Do you think you bring your paltry money here as a favour or a gift; or as a matter of business, and in return for value received?" 309

"Was presently conducted by a robber, with a very large belt and buckle round his waist, and very large leather gauntlets on his hands, into the presence of his former manager" . . 320

"Aha!" cried the old gentleman, folding his hands, and squeezing them with great force against each other. "I see her now; I see her now! My love, my life, my bride, my peerless beauty! She is come at last—at last—and all is gas and gaiters" 328

"Two men, seizing each other by the throat, struggled into the middle of the room" . . 336

"I'll be married in the bottle-green," cried Arthur Gride 341

"I must beseech you to contemplate again the fearful course to which you have been impelled" 353

"Thieves! thieves!" shrieked the usurer, starting up and folding his book to his breast, "robbers! murder!" 357

"He drew Ralph Nickleby to the further end of the room, and pointed towards Gride, who sat huddled together in a corner, fumbling nervously with the buttons of his coat, and exhibiting a face, of which every skulking and base expression was sharpened and aggravated to the utmost by his anxiety and trepidation" . 361

"There is something missing, you say," said Ralph, shaking him furiously by the collar. "What is it?" 372

"Do you see this? This is a bottle" . . . 380

"Who tampered with a selfish father, urging him to sell his daughter to old Arthur Gride, and tampered with Gride too, and did so in the little office, with a closet in the room?" . . 389

"Total, all up with Squeers!" 396

"Clasping the iron railings with his hands, looked eagerly in, wondering which might be his grave" 408

"Oh, Mr. Linkinwater, you're joking!"
"No, no, I'm not. I'm not, indeed," said Tim. "I will if you will. Do, my dear!" . . 412

Tail-piece.

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES ALL THE REST.

THERE once lived, in a sequestered part of the county of Devonshire, one Mr. Godfrey Nickleby a worthy gentleman, who, taking it into his head rather late in life that he must get married, and not being young enough or rich enough to aspire to the hand of a lady of fortune, had wedded an old flame out of mere attachment, who in her turn had taken him for the same reason. Thus two people, who cannot afford to play cards for money, sometimes sit down to a quiet game for love.

Some ill-conditioned persons who sneer at the life-matrimonial may perhaps suggest, in this place, that the good couple would be better likened to two principals in a sparring match, who, when fortune is low and backers scarce, will chivalrously set to, for the mere pleasure of the buffeting; and in one respect, indeed, this comparison would hold good: for, as the adventurous pair of the Fives' Court will afterwards send round a hat, and trust to the bounty of the lookers-on for the means of regaling themselves,

so Mr. Godfrey Nickleby and *his* partner, the honeymoon being over, looked out wistfully into the world, relying in no inconsiderable degree upon chance for the improvement of their means. Mr. Nickleby's income, at the period of his marriage, fluctuated between sixty and eighty pounds *per annum*.

There are people enough in the world, Heaven knows! and even in London (where Mr. Nickleby dwelt in those days) but few complaints prevail of the population being scanty. It is extraordinary how long a man may look among the crowd without discovering the face of a friend, but it is no less true. Mr. Nickleby looked, and looked, till his eyes became sore as his heart, but no friend appeared; and when, growing tired of the search, he turned his eyes homeward, he saw very little there to relieve his weary vision. A painter who has gazed too long upon some glaring colour, refreshes his dazzled sight by looking upon a darker and more sombre tint; but everything that met Mr. Nickleby's gaze wore so black and gloomy a hue, that he would have been beyond description refreshed by the very reverse of the contrast.

At length, after five years, when Mrs. Nickleby had presented her husband with a couple of sons, and that embarrassed gentleman, impressed with the necessity of making some provision for his family, was seriously revolving in his mind a little commercial speculation of insuring his life next quarter-day, and then falling from the top of the Monument by accident, there came, one morning, by the general post, a black-bordered letter to inform him how his uncle, Mr. Ralph Nickleby, was dead, and had left him the bulk of his little property, amounting in all to five thousand pounds sterling.

As the deceased had taken no further notice of his nephew, in his lifetime, than sending to his eldest boy (who had been christened after him, on desperate speculation) a silver spoon in a morocco case, which, as he had not too much to eat with it, seemed a kind of satire upon his having been born without that useful article of plate in his mouth, Mr. Godfrey Nickleby could, at first, scarcely believe the tidings thus conveyed to him. On examination, however, they turned out to be strictly correct. The amiable old gentleman, it seemed, had intended to leave the whole to the Royal Humane Society, and had, indeed, executed a will to that effect; but the Institution having been unfortunate enough, a few months before, to save the life of a poor relation to whom he paid a weekly allowance of three shillings and sixpence, he had, in a fit of very natural exasperation, revoked the bequest in a codicil, and left it all to Mr. Godfrey Nickleby; with a special mention of his indignation, not only against the society for saving the poor relation's life, but against the poor relation also, for allowing himself to be saved.

With a portion of this property Mr. Godfrey Nickleby purchased a small farm near Dawlish, in Devonshire, whither he retired with his wife and two children, to live upon the best interest he could get for the rest of his money, and the little produce he could raise from his land. The two prospered so well together that, when he died, some fifteen years after this period, and some five after his wife, he was enabled to leave to his eldest son, Ralph, three thousand pounds in cash, and to his youngest son, Nicholas, one thousand and the farm, which was as small a landed estate as one would desire to see.

These two brothers had been brought up together in a school at Exeter; and, being accustomed to go home once a week, had often heard, from their mother's lips, long accounts of their father's sufferings in his days of poverty, and of their deceased uncle's importance in his days of affluence: which recitals produced a very different impression on the two: for, while the younger, who was of a timid and retiring disposition, gleaned from thence nothing but forewarnings to shun the great world and attach himself to the quiet routine of a country life, Ralph, the elder, deduced from the often-repeated tale the two great morals that riches are the only true source of happiness and power, and that it is lawful and just to compass their acquisition by all means short of felony. "And," reasoned Ralph with himself, "if no good came of my uncle's money when he was alive, a great deal of good came of it after he was dead, inasmuch as my father has got it now, and is saving it up for me, which is a highly virtuous purpose; and, going back to the old gentleman, good *did* come of it to him too, for he had the pleasure of thinking of it all his life long, and of being envied and courted by all his family besides." And Ralph always wound up these mental soliloquies by arriving at the conclusion, that there was nothing like money.

Not confining himself to theory, or permitting his faculties to rust, even at that early age, in mere abstract speculations, this promising lad commenced usurer on a limited scale at school; putting out at good interest a small capital of slate-pencil and marbles, and gradually extending his operations until they aspired to the copper coinage of this realm, in which he speculated to considerable advantage. Nor did

he trouble his borrowers with abstract calculations of figures, or references to ready-reckoners; his simple rule of interest being all comprised in the one golden sentence, "Twopence for every halfpenny," which greatly simplified the accounts, and which, as a familiar precept, more easily acquired and retained in the memory than any known rule of arithmetic, cannot be too strongly recommended to the notice of capitalists, both large and small, and more especially of money brokers and bill discounters. Indeed, to do these gentlemen justice, many of them are to this day in the frequent habit of adopting it with eminent success.

In like manner did young Ralph Nickleby avoid all those minute and intricate calculations of odd days, which nobody who has worked sums in simple interest can fail to have found most embarrassing, by establishing the one general rule that all sums of principal and interest should be paid on pocket-money day, that is to say, on Saturday: and that whether a loan were contracted on the Monday, or on the Friday, the amount of interest should be, in both cases, the same. Indeed, he argued, and with great show of reason, that it ought to be rather more for one day than for five, inasmuch as the borrower might in the former case be very fairly presumed to be in great extremity, otherwise he would not borrow at all with such odds against him. This fact is interesting, as illustrating the secret connection and sympathy which always exist between great minds. Though Master Ralph Nickleby was not at that time aware of it, the class of gentlemen before alluded to proceed on just the same principle in all their transactions.

From what we have said of this young gentleman, and the natural admiration the reader will immediately conceive of his character, it may perhaps be inferred that he is to be the hero of the work which we shall presently begin. To set this point at rest, for once and for ever, we hasten to undeceive them, and stride to its commencement.

On the death of his father, Ralph Nickleby, who had been some time before placed in a mercantile house in London, applied himself passionately to his old pursuit of money-getting, in which he speedily became so buried and absorbed, that he quite forgot his brother for many years; and if, at times, a recollection of his old playfellow broke upon him through the haze in which he lived—for gold conjures up a mist about a man, more destructive of all his old senses and lulling to his feelings than the fumes of charcoal—it brought along with it a companion thought, that if they were intimate he would want to borrow money of him. So, Mr. Ralph Nickleby shrugged his shoulders, and said things were better as they were.

As for Nicholas, he lived a single man on the patrimonial estate until he grew tired of living alone, and then he took to wife the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman with a dower of one thousand pounds. This good lady bore him two children, a son and a daughter, and when the son was about nineteen, and the daughter fourteen, as near as we can guess—impartial records of young ladies' ages being, before the passing of the new act, nowhere preserved in the registries of this country—Mr. Nickleby looked about him for the means of repairing his capital, now sadly reduced by this increase in his family, and the expenses of their education.

"Speculate with it," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"Spec—u—late, my dear?" said Mr. Nickleby, as though in doubt.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Nickleby.

"Because, my dear, if we *should* lose it," rejoined Mr. Nickleby, who was a slow and time-taking speaker, "if we *should* lose it, we shall no longer be able to live, my dear."

"Fiddle," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"I am not altogether sure of that, my dear," said Mr. Nickleby.

"There's Nicholas," pursued the lady, "quite a young man—it's time he was in the way of doing something for himself; and Kate too, poor girl, without a penny in the world. Think of your brother! Would he be what he is, if he hadn't speculated?"

"That's true," replied Mr. Nickleby. "Very good, my dear. Yes. I *will* speculate, my dear."

Speculation is a round game; the players see little or nothing of their cards at first starting; gains *may* be great—and so may losses. The run of luck went against Mr. Nickleby. A mania prevailed, a bubble burst, four stockbrokers took villa residences at Florence, four hundred nobodies were ruined, and among them Mr. Nickleby.

"The very house I live in," sighed the poor gentleman, "may be taken from me to-morrow. Not an article of my old furniture but will be sold to strangers!"

The last reflection hurt him so much, that he took at once to his bed; apparently resolved to keep that, at all events.

"Cheer up, sir!" said the apothecary.

"You mustn't let yourself be cast down, sir," said the nurse.

"Such things happen every day," remarked the lawyer.

"And it is very sinful to rebel against them," whispered the clergyman.

"And what no man with a family ought to do," added the neighbours.

Mr. Nickleby shook his head, and, motioning them all out of the room, embraced his wife and children, and having pressed them by turns to his languidly-beating heart, sunk exhausted on his pillow. They were concerned to find that his reason went astray after this; for he babbled, for a long time, about the generosity and goodness of his brother, and the merry old times when they were at school together. This fit of wandering past, he solemnly commended them to One who never deserted the widow or her fatherless children, and, smiling gently on them, turned upon his face, and observed that he thought he could fall asleep.

CHAPTER II.

OF MR. RALPH NICKLEBY, AND HIS ESTABLISHMENT, AND HIS UNDERTAKINGS. AND OF A GREAT JOINT-STOCK COMPANY OF VAST NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

MR. RALPH NICKLEBY was not, strictly speaking, what you would call a merchant, neither was he a banker, nor an attorney, nor a special pleader, nor a notary. He was certainly not a tradesman, and still less could he lay any claim to the title of a professional gentleman; for it would have been impossible to mention any recognised profession to which he belonged. Nevertheless, as he lived in a spacious house in Golden Square, which, in addition to a brass plate upon the street-door, had another brass plate two sizes and a half smaller upon the left-hand door-post, surmounting a brass model of an infant's fist grasping a fragment of a skewer, and displaying the word "Office," it was clear that Mr. Ralph Nickleby did, or pretended to do, business of some kind; and the fact, if it required any further circumstantial evidence, was abundantly demonstrated by the diurnal attendance, between the hours of half-past nine and five, of a sallow-faced man in rusty brown, who sat upon an uncommonly hard stool in a species of butler's pantry at the end of the passage, and always had a pen behind his ear when he answered the bell.

Although a few members of the graver professions lived about Golden Square, it is not exactly in anybody's way to or from anywhere. It is one of the squares that have been; a quarter of the town that has gone down in the world, and taken to letting lodgings. Many of its first and second floors are let, furnished, to single gentlemen; and it takes boarders besides. It is a great resort of foreigners. The dark-complexioned men who wear large rings and heavy watch-guards, and bushy whiskers, and who congregate under the Opera Colonnade, and about the box office in the season, between four and five in the afternoon, when they give away the orders,—all live in Golden Square, or within a street of it. Two or three violins and a wind instrument from the Opera band reside within its precincts. Its boarding-houses are musical, and the notes of pianos and harps float in the evening-time round the head of the mournful statue, the guardian genius of a little wilderness of shrubs, in the centre of the square. On a summer's night windows are thrown open, and groups of swarthy moustached men are seen, by the passers-by, lounging at the casements, and smoking fearfully. Sounds of gruff voices practising vocal music invade the evening's silence: and the fumes of choice tobacco scent the air. There, snuff and cigars, and German pipes and flutes, and violins and violoncellos, divide the supremacy between them. It is the region of song and smoke. Street bands are on their mettle in Golden Square; and itinerant glee-singers quaver involuntarily as they raise their voices within its boundaries.

This would not seem a spot very well adapted to the transaction of business; but Mr. Ralph Nickleby had lived there, notwithstanding, for many years, and uttered no complaint on that score. He knew nobody round about, and nobody knew him, although he enjoyed the reputation of being immensely rich. The tradesmen held that he was a sort of lawyer, and the other neighbours opined that he was a kind of general agent; both of which guesses were as correct and definite as guesses about other people's affairs usually are, or need to be.

Mr. Ralph Nickleby sat in his private office one morning, ready dressed to walk abroad. He wore a bottle-green spencer over a blue coat: a white waistcoat, grey mixture pantaloons, and Wellington boots drawn over them. The corner of a small-plaited shirt-frill struggled out, as if insisting to show itself from between his chin and the top button of his spencer; and the latter garment was not made low enough to conceal a long gold watch-chain, composed of a series of plain rings, which had its beginning at the handle of a gold repeater in Mr. Nickleby's pocket, and its termination in two little keys:

one belonging to the watch itself, and the other to some patent padlock. He wore a sprinkling of powder upon his head, as if to make himself look benevolent; but, if that were his purpose, he would perhaps have done better to powder his countenance also, for there was something in its very wrinkles, and in his cold restless eye, which seemed to tell of cunning that would announce itself in spite of him. However this might be, there he was: and as he was all alone, neither the powder, nor the wrinkles, nor the eyes, had the smallest effect, good or bad, upon anybody just then, and are consequently no business of ours just now.

Mr. Nickleby closed an account book which lay on his desk, and, throwing himself back in his chair, gazed with an air of abstraction through the dirty window. Some London houses have a melancholy little plot of ground behind them, usually fenced in by four high whitewashed walls, and frowned upon by stacks of chimneys: in which there withers on, from year to year, a crippled tree, that makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in autumn when other trees shed theirs, and, drooping in the effort, lingers on, all crackled and smoke-dried, till the following season, when it repeats the same process, and perhaps, if the weather be particularly genial, even tempts some rheumatic sparrow to chirrup in its branches. People sometimes call these dark yards "gardens;" it is not supposed that they were ever planted, but rather that they are pieces of unreclaimed land, with the withered vegetation of the original brick-field. No man thinks of walking in this desolate place, or of turning it to any account. A few hampers, half-a-dozen broken bottles, and such-like rubbish, may be thrown there when the tenant first moves in, but nothing more: and there they remain until he goes away again: the damp straw taking just as long to moulder as it thinks proper: and mingling with the scanty box, and stunted everbrowns, and broken flower-pots, that are scattered mournfully about —a prey to "blacks" and dirt.

It was into a place of this kind that Mr. Ralph Nickleby gazed, as he sat with his hands in his pockets looking out at window. He had fixed his eyes upon a distorted fir-tree, planted by some former tenant in a tub that had once been green, and left there, years before, to rot away piecemeal. There was nothing very inviting in the object, but Mr. Nickleby was wrapped in a brown study, and sat contemplating it with far greater attention than, in a more conscious mood, he would have deigned to bestow upon the rarest exotic. At length his eyes wandered to a little dirty window on the left, through which the face of the clerk was dimly visible; that worthy chancing to look up, he beckoned him to attend.

In obedience to this summons, the clerk got off the high stool (to which he had communicated a high polish by countless gettings off and on), and presented himself in Mr. Nickleby's room. He was a tall man of middle age, with two goggle eyes whereof one was a fixture, a rubicund nose, a cadaverous face, and a suit of clothes (if the term be allowable when they suited him not at all) much the worse for wear, very much too small, and placed upon such a short allowance of buttons that it was marvellous how he contrived to keep them on.

"Was that half-past twelve, Noggs?" said Mr. Nickleby in a sharp and grating voice.

"Not more than five-and-twenty minutes by the——" Noggs was going to add "public-house clock," but recollecting himself, substituted "regular time."

"My watch has stopped," said Mr. Nickleby; "I don't know from what cause."

"Not wound up," said Noggs.

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Nickleby.

"Over-wound then," rejoined Noggs.

"That can't very well be," observed Mr. Nickleby.

"Must be," said Noggs.

"Well!" said Mr. Nickleby, putting the repeater back in his pocket; "perhaps it is."

Noggs gave a peculiar grunt, as was his custom at the end of all disputes with his master, to imply that he (Noggs) triumphed; and (as he rarely spoke to anybody unless somebody spoke to him) fell into a grim silence, and rubbed his hands slowly over each other: cracking the joints of his fingers, and squeezing them into all possible distortions. The incessant performance of this routine on every occasion, and the communication of a fixed and rigid look to his unaffected eye, so as to make it uniform with the other, and to render it impossible for anybody to determine where or at what he was looking, were two among the numerous peculiarities of Mr. Noggs which struck an inexperienced observer at first sight.

"I am going to the London Tavern this morning," said Mr. Nickleby.

"Public meeting?" inquired Noggs.

Mr. Nickleby nodded. "I expect a letter from the solicitor respecting that mortgage of Ruddle's. If it comes at all, it will be here by the two-o'clock delivery. I shall leave the City about that time, and walk to Charing Cross on the left-hand side of the way; if there are any

letters, come and meet me, and bring them with you."

Noggs nodded; and, as he nodded, there came a ring at the office bell. The master looked up from his papers, and the clerk calmly remained in a stationary position.

"The bell," said Noggs, as though in explanation. "At home?"

"Yes."

"To anybody?"

"Yes."

"To the tax-gatherer?"

"No! Let him call again."

Noggs gave vent to his usual grunt, as much as to say, "I thought so!" and, the ring being repeated, went to the door, whence he presently returned, ushering in, by the name of Mr. Bonney, a pale gentleman in a violent hurry, who, with his hair standing up in great disorder all over his head, and a very narrow white cravat tied loosely round his throat, looked as if he had been knocked up in the night, and had not dressed himself since.

"My dear Nickleby," said the gentleman, taking off a white hat which was so full of papers that it would scarcely stick upon his head, "there's not a moment to lose; I have a cab at the door. Sir Matthew Pupker takes the chair, and three members of Parliament are positively coming. I have seen two of them safely out of bed. The third, who was at Crockford's all night, has just gone home to put a clean shirt on, and take a bottle or two of soda water, and will certainly be with us in time to address the meeting. He is a little excited by last night, but never mind that; he always speaks the stronger for it."

"It seems to promise pretty well," said Mr. Ralph Nickleby, whose deliberate manner was strongly opposed to the vivacity of the other man of business.

"Pretty well!" echoed Mr. Bonney. "It's the finest idea that was ever started. 'United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. Capital, five millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each.' Why, the very name will get the shares up to a premium in ten days!"

"And when they *are* at a premium——" said Mr. Ralph Nickleby, smiling.

"When they are, you know what to do with them as well as any man alive, and how to back quietly out at the right time," said Mr. Bonney, slapping the capitalist familiarly on the shoulder. "By-the-bye, what a *very* remarkable man that clerk of yours is!"

"Yes, poor devil!" replied Ralph, drawing on his gloves. "Though Newman Noggs kept his horses and hounds once."

"Ay, ay?" said the other carelessly.

"Yes," continued Ralph, "and not many years ago either; but he squandered his money, invested it anyhow, borrowed at interest, and, in short, made first a thorough fool of himself, and then a beggar. He took to drinking, and had a touch of paralysis, and then came here to borrow a pound, as in his better days I had——"

"Done business with him," said Mr. Bonney with a meaning look.

"Just so," replied Ralph; "I couldn't lend it, you know."

"Oh, of course not!"

"But as I wanted a clerk just then, to open the door and so forth, I took him out of charity, and he has remained with me ever since. He is a little mad, I think," said Mr. Nickleby, calling up a charitable look, "but he is useful enough, poor creature—useful enough."

The kind-hearted gentleman omitted to add that Newman Noggs, being utterly destitute, served him for rather less than the usual wages of a boy of thirteen; and likewise failed to mention, in his hasty chronicle, that his eccentric taciturnity rendered him an especially valuable person in a place where much business was done, of which it was desirable no mention should be made out of doors. The other gentleman was plainly impatient to be gone, however, and, as they hurried into the hackney cabriolet immediately afterwards, perhaps Mr. Nickleby forgot to mention circumstances so unimportant.

There was a great bustle in Bishopsgate Street Within as they drew up, and (it being a windy day) half-a-dozen men were tacking across the road under a press of paper, bearing gigantic announcements that a Public Meeting would be holden at one o'clock precisely, to take into consideration the propriety of petitioning Parliament in favour of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company, capital five millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each; which sums were duly set forth in fat black figures of considerable size. Mr. Bonney elbowed his way briskly up-stairs, receiving in his progress many low bows from the waiters who stood on the landings to show the way; and, followed by Mr. Nickleby, dived into a suite of apartments behind the great public room: in the second of which was a business-looking table, and several business-looking people.

"Hear!" cried a gentleman with a double chin as Mr. Bonney presented himself. "Chair, gentlemen, chair!"

The new-comers were received with universal approbation, and Mr. Bonney bustled up to the top of the table, took off his hat, ran his fingers through his hair, and knocked a hackney coachman's knock on the table with a little hammer: whereat several gentlemen cried "Hear!" and nodded slightly to each other, as much as to say what spirited conduct that was. Just at this moment, a waiter, feverish with agitation, tore into the room, and, throwing the door open with a crash, shouted, "Sir Matthew Pupker!"

The committee stood up and clapped their hands for joy; and while they were clapping them, in came Sir Matthew Pupker, attended by two live members of Parliament, one Irish and one Scotch, all smiling and bowing, and looking so pleasant that it seemed a perfect marvel how any man could have the heart to vote against them. Sir Matthew Pupker especially, who had a little round head with a flaxen wig on the top of it, fell into such a paroxysm of bows, that the wig threatened to be jerked off, every instant. When these symptoms had in some degree subsided, the gentlemen who were on speaking terms with Sir Matthew Pupker, or the two other members, crowded round them in three little groups, near one or other of which the gentlemen who were *not* on speaking terms with Sir Matthew Pupker or the two other members stood lingering, and smiling, and rubbing their hands, in the desperate hope of something turning up which might bring them into notice. All this time, Sir Matthew Pupker and the two other members were relating to their separate circles what the intentions of government were about taking up the bill; with a full account of what the government had said in a whisper the last time they dined with it, and how the government had been observed to wink when it said so; from which premises they were at no loss to draw the conclusion, that if the government had one object more at heart than another, that one object was the welfare and advantage of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company.

Meanwhile, and pending the arrangement of the proceedings, and a fair division of the speechifying, the public in the large room were eyeing, by turns, the empty platform, and the ladies in the Music Gallery. In these amusements the greater portion of them had been occupied for a couple of hours before, and, as the most agreeable diversions pall upon the taste on a too protracted enjoyment of them, the sterner spirits now began to hammer the floor with their boot-heels, and to express their dissatisfaction by various hoots and cries. These vocal exertions, emanating from the people who had been there longest, naturally proceeded from those who were nearest to the platform and furthest from the policemen in attendance, who, having no great mind to fight their way through the crowd, but entertaining, nevertheless, a praiseworthy desire to do something to quell the disturbance, immediately began to drag forth, by the coat tails and collars, all the quiet people near the door; at the same time dealing out various smart and tingling blows with their truncheons, after the manner of that ingenious actor, Mr. Punch: whose brilliant example, both in the fashion of his weapons and their use, this branch of the executive occasionally follows.

Several very exciting skirmishes were in progress, when a loud shout attracted the attention even of the belligerents, and then there poured on to the platform, from a door at the side, a long line of gentlemen with their hats off, all looking behind them, and uttering vociferous cheers; the cause whereof was sufficiently explained when Sir Matthew Pupker and the two other real members of Parliament came to the front, amidst deafening shouts, and testified to each other, in dumb motions, that they had never seen such a glorious sight as that in the whole course of their public career.

At length, and at last, the assembly left off shouting, but Sir Matthew Pupker being voted into the chair, they underwent a relapse which lasted five minutes. This over, Sir Matthew Pupker went on to say what must be his feelings on that great occasion, and what must be that occasion in the eyes of the world, and what must be the intelligence of his fellow-countrymen before him, and what must be the wealth and respectability of his honourable friends behind him, and lastly, what must be the importance to the wealth, the happiness, the comfort, the liberty, the very existence of a free and great people, of such an Institution as the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company!

Mr. Bonney then presented himself to move the first resolution; and having run his right hand through his hair, and planted his left, in an easy manner, in his ribs, he consigned his hat to the care of the gentleman with the double chin (who acted as a species of bottle-holder to the orators generally), and said he would read to them the first resolution—"That this meeting views with alarm and apprehension the

existing state of the Muffin trade in this Metropolis and its neighbourhood; that it considers the Muffin Boys, as at present constituted, wholly undeserving the confidence of the public; and that it deems the whole Muffin system alike prejudicial to the health and morals of the people, and subversive of the best interests of a great commercial and mercantile community." The honourable gentleman made a speech which drew tears from the eyes of the ladies, and awakened the liveliest emotions in every individual present. He had visited the houses of the poor in the various districts of London, and had found them destitute of the slightest vestige of a muffin, which there appeared too much reason to believe some of these indigent persons did not taste from year's end to year's end. He had found that among muffin-sellers there existed drunkenness, debauchery, and profligacy, which he attributed to the debasing nature of their employment as at present exercised; he had found the same vices among the poorer class of people who ought to be muffin consumers; and this he attributed to the despair engendered by their being placed beyond the reach of that nutritious article, which drove them to seek a false stimulant in intoxicating liquors. He would undertake to prove before a committee of the House of Commons that there existed a combination to keep up the price of muffins, and to give the bellmen a monopoly; he would prove it by bellmen at the bar of that House; and he would also prove that these men corresponded with each other by secret words and signs, as "Snooks," "Walker," "Ferguson," "Is Murphy right?" and many others. It was this melancholy state of things that the Company proposed to correct; firstly, by prohibiting, under heavy penalties, all private muffin trading of every description; secondly, by themselves supplying the public generally, and the poor at their own homes, with muffins of first quality at reduced prices. It was with this object that a bill had been introduced into Parliament by their patriotic chairman, Sir Matthew Pupker; it was this bill that they had met to support; it was the supporters of this bill who would confer undying brightness and splendour upon England, under the name of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company; he would add, with a capital of Five Millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each.

Mr. Ralph Nickleby seconded the resolution, and another gentleman having moved that it be amended by the insertion of the words "and crumpet" after the word "muffin," whenever it occurred, it was carried triumphantly. Only one man in the crowd cried "No!" and he was promptly taken into custody, and straightway borne off.

The second resolution, which recognised the expediency of immediately abolishing "all muffin (or crumpet) sellers, all traders in muffins (or crumpets) of whatsoever description, whether male or female, boys or men, ringing hand-bells or otherwise," was moved by a grievous gentleman of semi-clerical appearance, who went at once into such deep pathetics, that he knocked the first speaker clean out of the course in no time. You might have heard a pin fall—a pin! a feather—as he described the cruelties inflicted on muffin boys by their masters, which he very wisely urged were in themselves a sufficient reason for the establishment of that inestimable company. It seemed that the unhappy youths were nightly turned out into the wet streets at the most inclement periods of the year, to wander about in darkness and rain—or it might be hail or snow—for hours together, without shelter, food, or warmth; and let the public never forget, upon the latter point, that while the muffins were provided with warm clothing and blankets, the boys were wholly unprovided for, and left to their own miserable resources. (Shame!) The honourable gentleman related one case of a muffin boy, who, having been exposed to this inhuman and barbarous system for no less than five years, at length fell a victim to a cold in the head, beneath which he gradually sunk until he fell into a perspiration and recovered; this he could vouch for on his own authority, but he had heard (and he had no reason to doubt the fact) of a still more heart-rending and appalling circumstance. He had heard of the case of an orphan muffin boy, who, having been run over by a hackney carriage, had been removed to the hospital, had undergone the amputation of his leg below the knee, and was now actually pursuing his occupation on crutches. Fountain of justice, were these things to last?

This was the department of the subject that took the meeting, and this was the style of speaking to enlist their sympathies. The men shouted; the ladies wept into their pocket-handkerchiefs till they were moist, and waved them till they were dry; the excitement was tremendous; and Mr. Nickleby whispered his friend that the shares were thenceforth at a premium of five-and-twenty per cent.

The resolution was, of course, carried with loud

acclamations, every man holding up both hands in favour of it, as he would in his enthusiasm have held up both legs also, if he could have conveniently accomplished it. This done, the draft of the proposed petition was read at length: and the petition said, as all petitions *do* say, that the petitioners were very humble, and the petitioned very honourable, and the object very virtuous; therefore (said the petition) the bill ought to be passed into a law at once, to the everlasting honour and glory of that most honourable and glorious Commons of England in Parliament assembled.

Then, the gentleman who had been at Crockford's all night, and who looked something the worse about the eyes in consequence, came forward to tell his fellow-countrymen what a speech he meant to make in favour of that petition whenever it should be presented, and how desperately he meant to taunt the Parliament if they rejected the bill; and to inform them, also, that he regretted his honourable friends had not inserted a clause rendering the purchase of muffins and crumpets compulsory upon all classes of the community, which he—opposing all half-measures, and preferring to go the extreme animal—pledged himself to propose and divide upon in committee. After announcing this determination, the honourable gentleman grew jocular; and, as patent boots, lemon-coloured kid gloves, and a fur coat collar assist jokes materially, there was immense laughter and much cheering, and, moreover, such a brilliant display of ladies' pocket-handkerchiefs as threw the grievous gentleman quite into the shade.

And when the petition had been read, and was about to be adopted, there came forward the Irish member (who was a young gentleman of ardent temperament), with such a speech as only an Irish member can make, breathing the true soul and spirit of poetry, and poured forth with such fervour, that it made one warm to look at him; in the course whereof he told them how he would demand the extension of that great boon to his native country; how he would claim for her equal rights in the muffin laws as in all other laws; and how he yet hoped to see the day when crumpets should be toasted in her lowly cabins, and muffin bells should ring in her rich green valleys. And, after him, came the Scotch member, with various pleasant allusions to the probable amount of profits, which increased the good-humour that the poetry had awakened; and all the speeches put together did exactly what they were intended to do, and established in the hearers' minds that there was no speculation so promising, or at the same time so praiseworthy, as the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company.

So, the petition in favour of the bill was agreed upon, and the meeting adjourned with acclamations, and Mr. Nickleby and the other directors went to the office to lunch, as they did every day at half-past one o'clock; and to remunerate themselves for which trouble (as the company was yet in its infancy), they only charged three guineas each man for every such attendance.

CHAPTER III.

MR. RALPH NICKLEBY RECEIVES SAD TIDINGS OF HIS BROTHER, BUT BEARS UP NOBLY AGAINST THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNICATED TO HIM. THE READER IS INFORMED HOW HE LIKED NICHOLAS, WHO IS HEREIN INTRODUCED, AND HOW KINDLY HE PROPOSED TO MAKE HIS FORTUNE AT ONCE.

HAVING rendered his zealous assistance towards dispatching the lunch with all that promptitude and energy which are among the most important qualities that men of business can possess, Mr. Ralph Nickleby took a cordial farewell of his fellow-speculators, and bent his steps westward in unwonted good-humour. As he passed St. Paul's he stepped aside into a doorway to set his watch, and, with his hand on the key and his eye on the cathedral dial, was intent upon so doing, when a man suddenly stopped before him. It was Newman Noggs.

"Ah! Newman," said Mr. Nickleby, looking up as he pursued his occupation. "The letter about the mortgage has come, has it? I thought it would."

"Wrong," replied Newman.

"What! and nobody called respecting it?" inquired Mr. Nickleby, pausing. Noggs shook his head.

"What *has* come, then?" inquired Mr. Nickleby.

"I have," said Newman.

"What else?" demanded the master sternly.

"This," said Newman, drawing a sealed letter slowly from his pocket. "Post-mark, Strand, black wax, black border, woman's hand, C. N. in the corner."

"Black wax?" said Mr. Nickleby, glancing at the letter. "I know something of that hand, too. Newman, I shouldn't be surprised if my brother were dead."

"I don't think you would," said Newman quietly.

"Why not, sir?" demanded Mr. Nickleby.

"You never are surprised," replied Newman, "that's all."

Mr. Nickleby snatched the letter from his assistant, and, fixing a cold look upon him, opened, read it, put it in his pocket, and having now hit the time to a second, began winding up his watch.

"It is as I expected, Newman," said Mr. Nickleby while he was thus engaged. "He *is* dead. Dear me! Well, that's a sudden thing. I shouldn't have thought it, really." With these touching expressions of sorrow, Mr. Nickleby replaced his watch in his fob, and, fitting on his gloves to a nicety, turned upon his way, and walked slowly westward with his hands behind him.

"Children alive?" inquired Noggs, stepping up to him.

"Why, that's the very thing," replied Mr. Nickleby, as though his thoughts were about them at that moment. "They are both alive."

"Both!" repeated Newman Noggs in a low voice.

"And the widow, too," added Mr. Nickleby, "and all three in London, confound them; all three here, Newman."

Newman fell a little behind his master, and his face was curiously twisted as by a spasm; but whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain. The expression of a man's face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the countenance of Newman Noggs, in his ordinary moods, was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve.

"Go home!" said Mr. Nickleby after they had walked a few paces: looking round at the clerk as if he were his dog. The words were scarcely uttered when Newman darted across the road, slunk among the crowd, and disappeared in an instant.

"Reasonable, certainly!" muttered Mr. Nickleby to himself as he walked on, "very reasonable! My brother never did anything for me, and I never expected it; the breath is no sooner out of his body than I am to be looked to as the support of a great hearty woman and a grown boy and girl. What are they to me? *I* never saw them."

Full of these, and many other reflections of a similar kind, Mr. Nickleby made the best of his way to the Strand, and, referring to his letter as if to ascertain the number of the house he wanted, stopped at a private door about halfway down that crowded thoroughfare.

A miniature painter lived there, for there was a large gilt frame screwed upon the street-door, in which were displayed, upon a black velvet ground, two portraits of naval dress-coats with faces looking out of them, and telescopes attached; one of a young gentleman in a very vermilion uniform, flourishing a sabre; and one of a literary character with a high forehead, a pen and ink, six books, and a curtain. There was, moreover, a touching representation of a young lady reading a manuscript in an unfathomable forest, and a charming whole length of a large-headed little boy, sitting on a stool with his legs foreshortened to the size of salt-spoons. Besides these works of art, there were a great many heads of old ladies and gentlemen smirking at each other out of blue and brown skies, and an elegantly-written card of terms with an embossed border.

Mr. Nickleby glanced at these frivolities with great contempt, and gave a double knock, which, having been thrice repeated, was answered by a servant-girl with an uncommonly dirty face.

"Is Mrs. Nickleby at home, girl?" demanded Ralph sharply.

"Her name ain't Nickleby," said the girl; "La Creevy you mean."

Mr. Nickleby looked very indignant at the handmaid on being thus corrected, and demanded with much asperity what she meant; which she was about to state, when a female voice, proceeding from a perpendicular staircase at the end of the passage, inquired who was wanted.

"Mrs. Nickleby," said Ralph.

"It's the second floor, Hannah," said the same voice. "What a stupid thing you are! Is the second floor at home?"

"Somebody went out just now, but I think it was the attic which had been a cleaning of himself," replied the girl.

"You had better see," said the invisible female. "Show the gentleman where the bell is, and tell him he mustn't knock double knocks for the second floor; I can't allow a knock except when the bell's broke, and then it must be two single ones."

"Here," said Ralph, walking in without more parley, "I beg your pardon; is that Mrs. La What's-her-name?"

"Creevy—La Creevy," replied the voice, as a yellow head-dress bobbed over the banisters.

"I'll speak to you a moment, ma'am, with your leave," said Ralph.

The voice replied that the gentleman was to

walk up; but he had walked up before it spoke, and, stepping into the first floor, was received by the wearer of the yellow head-dress, who had a gown to correspond, and was of much the same colour herself. Miss La Creevy was a mincing young lady of fifty, and Miss La Creevy's apartment was the gilt frame down-stairs on a larger scale and something dirtier.

"Hem!" said Miss La Creevy, coughing delicately behind her black silk mitten. "A miniature, I presume. A very strongly-marked countenance for the purpose, sir. Have you ever sat before?"

"You mistake my purpose, I see, ma'am," replied Mr. Nickleby in his usual blunt fashion. "I have no money to throw away on miniatures, ma'am, and nobody to give one to (thank God) if I had. Seeing you on the stairs, I wanted to ask a question of you about some lodgers here."

Miss La Creevy coughed once more—this cough was to conceal her disappointment—and said, "Oh, indeed!"

"I infer, from what you said to your servant, that the floor above belongs to you, ma'am," said Mr. Nickleby.

Yes, it did, Miss La Creevy replied. The upper part of the house belonged to her, and, as she had no necessity for the second-floor rooms just then, she was in the habit of letting them. Indeed, there was a lady from the country and her two children in them at that present speaking.

"A widow, ma'am?" said Ralph.

"Yes, she is a widow," replied the lady.

"A *poor* widow, ma'am," said Ralph, with a powerful emphasis on that little adjective which conveys so much.

"Well, I'm afraid she *is* poor," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"I happen to know that she is, ma'am," said Ralph. "Now, what business has a poor widow in such a house as this, ma'am?"

"Very true," replied Miss La Creevy, not at all displeased with this implied compliment to the apartments. "Exceedingly true."

"I know her circumstances intimately, ma'am," said Ralph; "in fact, I am a relation of the family; and I should recommend you not to keep them here, ma'am."

"I should hope, if there was any incompatibility to meet the pecuniary obligations," said Miss La Creevy with another cough, "that the lady's family would——"

"No, they wouldn't, ma'am," interrupted Ralph hastily. "Don't think it."

"If I am to understand that," said Miss La Creevy, "the case wears a very different appearance."

"You may understand it, then, ma'am," said Ralph, "and make your arrangements accordingly. I am the family, ma'am—at least, I believe I am the only relation they have, and I think it right that you should know *I* can't support them in their extravagances. How long have they taken these lodgings for?"

"Only from week to week," replied Miss La Creevy. "Mrs. Nickleby paid the first week in advance."

"Then you had better get them out at the end of it," said Ralph. "They can't do better than go back to the country, ma'am; they are in everybody's way here."

"Certainly," said Miss La Creevy, rubbing her hands, "if Mrs. Nickleby took the apartments without the means of paying for them, it was very unbecoming a lady."

"Of course it was, ma'am," said Ralph.

"And naturally," continued Miss La Creevy, "I who am, *at present*—hem—an unprotected female, cannot afford to lose by the apartments."

"Of course you can't, ma'am," replied Ralph.

"Though at the same time," added Miss La Creevy, who was plainly wavering between her good nature and her interest, "I have nothing whatever to say against the lady, who is extremely pleasant and affable, though, poor thing, she seems terribly low in her spirits; nor against the young people either, for nicer or better-behaved young people cannot be."

"Very well, ma'am," said Ralph, turning to the door, for these encomiums on poverty irritated him; "I have done my duty, and perhaps more than I ought: of course nobody will thank me for saying what I have."

"I am sure *I* am very much obliged to you at least, sir," said Miss La Creevy in a gracious manner. "Would you do me the favour to look at a few specimens of my portrait painting?"

"You're very good, ma'am," said Mr. Nickleby, making off with great speed; "but as I have a visit to pay up-stairs, and my time is precious, I really can't."

"At any other time when you are passing I shall be most happy," said Miss La Creevy. "Perhaps you will have the kindness to take a card of terms with you? Thank you—good morning!"

"Good morning, ma'am," said Ralph, shutting the door abruptly after him to prevent any further conversation. "Now for my sister-in-law. Bah!"

Climbing up another perpendicular flight, composed with great mechanical ingenuity of

nothing but corner stairs, Mr. Ralph Nickleby stopped to take breath on the landing, when he was overtaken by the handmaid, whom the politeness of Miss La Creevy had dispatched to announce him, and who had apparently been making a variety of unsuccessful attempts, since their last interview, to wipe her dirty face clean upon an apron much dirtier.

"What name?" said the girl.

"Nickleby," replied Ralph.

"Oh! Mrs. Nickleby," said the girl, throwing open the door, "here's Mr. Nickleby."

A lady in deep mourning rose as Mr. Ralph Nickleby entered, but appeared incapable of advancing to meet him, and leant upon the arm of a slight but very beautiful girl of about seventeen, who had been sitting by her. A youth, who appeared a year or two older, stepped forward and saluted Ralph as his uncle.

"Oh!" growled Ralph with an ill-favoured frown, "you are Nicholas, I suppose?"

"That is my name, sir," replied the youth.

"Put my hat down," said Ralph imperiously. "Well, ma'am, how do you do? You must bear up against sorrow, ma'am; *I* always do."

"Mine was no common loss!" said Mrs. Nickleby, applying her handkerchief to her eyes.

"It was no *un*common loss, ma'am," returned Ralph as he coolly unbuttoned his spencer. "Husbands die every day, ma'am, and wives too."

"And brothers also, sir," said Nicholas with a glance of indignation.

"Yes, sir, and puppies, and pug-dogs likewise," replied his uncle, taking a chair. "You didn't mention in your letter what my brother's complaint was, ma'am."

"The doctors could attribute it to no particular disease," said Mrs. Nickleby, shedding tears. "We have too much reason to fear that he died of a broken heart."

"Pooh!" said Ralph, "there's no such thing. I can understand a man's dying of a broken neck, or suffering from a broken arm, or a broken head, or a broken leg, or a broken nose; but a broken heart!—nonsense, it's the cant of the day. If a man can't pay his debts, he dies of a broken heart, and his widow's a martyr."

"Some people, I believe, have no hearts to break," observed Nicholas quietly.

"How old is this boy, for God's sake?" inquired Ralph, wheeling back his chair, and surveying his nephew from head to foot with intense scorn.

"Nicholas is very nearly nineteen," replied the widow.

"Nineteen, eh?" said Ralph. "And what do you mean to do for your bread, sir?"

"Not to live upon my mother," replied Nicholas, his heart swelling as he spoke.

"You'd have little enough to live upon if you did," retorted the uncle, eyeing him contemptuously.

"Whatever it be," said Nicholas, flushed with anger, "I shall not look to you to make it more."

"Nicholas, my dear, recollect yourself," remonstrated Mrs. Nickleby.

"Dear Nicholas, pray!" urged the young lady.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said Ralph. "Upon my word! Fine beginnings, Mrs. Nickleby—fine beginnings!"

Mrs. Nickleby made no other reply than entreating Nicholas by a gesture to keep silent; and the uncle and nephew looked at each other for some seconds without speaking. The face of the old man was stern, hard-featured, and forbidding; that of the young one open, handsome, and ingenuous. The old man's eye was keen with the twinklings of avarice and cunning; the young man's bright with the light of intelligence and spirit. His figure was somewhat slight, but manly, and well formed; and, apart from all the grace of youth and comeliness, there was an emanation from the warm young heart in his look and bearing which kept the old man down.

However striking such a contrast as this may be to lookers-on, none ever feel it with half the keenness or acuteness of perfection with which it strikes to the very soul of him whose inferiority it marks. It galled Ralph to the heart's core, and he hated Nicholas from that hour.

The mutual inspection was at length brought to a close by Ralph withdrawing his eyes with a great show of disdain, and calling Nicholas "a boy." This word is much used as a term of reproach by elderly gentlemen towards their juniors: probably with the view of deluding society into the belief that, if they could be young again, they wouldn't on any account.

"Well, ma'am," said Ralph impatiently, "the creditors have administered, you tell me, and there's nothing left for you?"

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Nickleby.

"And you spent what little money you had in coming all the way to London, to see what I could do for you?" pursued Ralph.

"I hoped," faltered Mrs. Nickleby, "that you might have an opportunity of doing something for your brother's children. It was his dying wish that I should appeal to you in their behalf."

"I don't know how it is," muttered Ralph, walking up and down the room, "but, whenever a man dies without any property of his own, he always seems to think he has a right to dispose of other people's. What is your daughter fit for, ma'am?"

"Kate has been well educated," sobbed Mrs. Nickleby. "Tell your uncle, my dear, how far you went in French and extras."

The poor girl was about to murmur something, when her uncle stopped her very unceremoniously.

"We must try and get you apprenticed at some boarding-school," said Ralph. "You have not been brought up too delicately for that, I hope?"

"No, indeed, uncle," replied the weeping girl. "I will try to do anything that will gain me a home and bread."

"Well, well," said Ralph, a little softened,

"THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW LOOKED AT EACH OTHER FOR SOME SECONDS WITHOUT SPEAKING."

either by his niece's beauty or her distress (stretch a point, and say the latter). "You must try it, and, if the life is too hard, perhaps dressmaking or tambour-work will come lighter. Have *you* ever done anything, sir?" (turning to his nephew.)

"No," replied Nicholas bluntly.

"No, I thought not!" said Ralph. "This is the way my brother brought up his children, ma'am."

"Nicholas has not long completed such education as his poor father could give him," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby, "and he was thinking of——"

"Of making something of him some day," said Ralph. "The old story; always thinking, and never doing. If my brother had been a man of activity and prudence, he might have left you a rich woman, ma'am: and if he had turned his son into the world, as my father turned me, when I wasn't as old as that boy by a year and a half, he would have been in a situation to help you, instead of being a burden upon you, and increasing your distress. My brother

was a thoughtless, inconsiderate man, Mrs. Nickleby, and nobody, I am sure, can have better reason to feel that than you."

This appeal set the widow upon thinking that perhaps she might have made a more successful venture with her one thousand pounds, and then she began to reflect what a comfortable sum it would have been just then; which dismal thoughts made her tears flow faster, and, in the excess of these griefs, she (being a well-meaning woman enough, but weak withal) fell first to deploring her hard fate, and then to remarking, with many sobs, that to be sure she had been a slave to poor Nicholas, and had often told him she might have married better (as indeed she had very often), and that she never knew in his lifetime how the money went, but that, if he had confided in her, they might all have been better off that day; with other bitter recollections common to most married ladies, either during their coverture, or afterwards, or at both periods. Mrs. Nickleby concluded by lamenting that the dear departed had never deigned to profit by her advice, save on one occasion: which was a strictly veracious statement, inasmuch as he had only acted upon it once, and had ruined himself in consequence.

Mr. Ralph Nickleby heard all this with a half-smile; and, when the widow had finished, quietly took up the subject where it had been left before the above outbreak.

"Are you willing to work, sir?" he inquired, frowning on his nephew.

"Of course I am," replied Nicholas haughtily.

"Then see here, sir," said his uncle. "This caught my eye this morning, and you may thank your stars for it."

With this exordium, Mr. Ralph Nickleby took a newspaper from his pocket, and after unfolding it, and looking for a short time among the advertisements, read as follows:

"'EDUCATION.—At Mr. Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, Youth are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single-stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature. Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr. Squeers is in town, and attends daily, from one till four, at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. N.B. An able assistant wanted. Annual salary £5. A Master of Arts would be preferred.'

"There!" said Ralph, folding the paper again. "Let him get that situation, and his fortune is made."

"But he is not a Master of Arts," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"That," replied Ralph, "that, I think, can be got over."

"But the salary is so small, and it is such a long way off, uncle!" faltered Kate.

"Hush, Kate my dear," interposed Mrs. Nickleby; "your uncle must know best."

"I say," repeated Ralph tartly, "let him get that situation, and his fortune is made. If he don't like that, let him get one for himself. Without friends, money, recommendation, or knowledge of business of any kind, let him find honest employment in London, which will keep him in shoe-leather, and I'll give him a thousand pounds. At least," said Mr. Ralph Nickleby, checking himself, "I would if I had it."

"Poor fellow!" said the young lady. "Oh! uncle, must we be separated so soon?"

"Don't tease your uncle with questions when he is thinking only for our good, my love," said Mrs. Nickleby, "Nicholas, my dear, I wish you would say something."

"Yes, mother, yes," said Nicholas, who had hitherto remained silent and absorbed in thought. "If I am fortunate enough to be appointed to this post, sir, for which I am so imperfectly qualified, what will become of those I leave behind?"

"Your mother and sister, sir," replied Ralph, "will be provided for, in that case (not otherwise), by me, and placed in some sphere of life in which they will be able to be independent. That will be my immediate care; they will not remain as they are one week after your departure, I will undertake."

"Then," said Nicholas, starting gaily up, and wringing his uncle's hand, "I am ready to do anything you wish me. Let us try our fortune with Mr. Squeers at once; he can but refuse."

"He won't do that," said Ralph. "He will be glad to have you on my recommendation. Make yourself of use to him, and you'll rise to be a partner in the establishment in no time. Bless me, only think! if he were to die, why your fortune's made at once."

"To be sure, I see it all," said poor Nicholas, delighted with a thousand visionary ideas that his good spirits and his inexperience were conjuring up before him. "Or suppose some young nobleman who is being educated at the Hall were to take a fancy to me, and get his

father to appoint me his travelling tutor when he left, and when we come back from the continent, procured me some handsome appointment. Eh! uncle?"

"Ah, to be sure!" sneered Ralph.

"And who knows but, when he came to see me when I was settled (as he would of course), he might fall in love with Kate, who would be keeping my house, and—and marry her, eh, uncle? Who knows?"

"Who indeed!" snarled Ralph.

"How happy we should be!" cried Nicholas with enthusiasm. "The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again. Kate will be a beautiful woman, and I so proud to hear them say so, and mother so happy to be with us once again, and all these sad times forgotten, and——" The picture was too bright a one to bear, and Nicholas, fairly overpowered by it, smiled faintly, and burst into tears.

This simple family, born and bred in retirement, and wholly unacquainted with what is called the world—a conventional phrase which, being interpreted, often signifieth all the rascals in it—mingled their tears together at the thought of their first separation; and, this first gush of feeling over, were proceeding to dilate with all the buoyancy of untried hope on the bright prospects before them, when Mr. Ralph Nickleby suggested that, if they lost time, some more fortunate candidate might deprive Nicholas of the stepping-stone to fortune which the advertisement pointed out, and so undermine all their air-built castles. This timely reminder effectually stopped the conversation. Nicholas, having carefully copied the address of Mr. Squeers, the uncle and nephew issued forth together in quest of that accomplished gentleman; Nicholas firmly persuading himself that he had done his relative great injustice in disliking him at first sight; and Mrs. Nickleby being at some pains to inform her daughter that she was sure he was a much more kindly-disposed person than he seemed; which, Miss Nickleby dutifully remarked, he might very easily be.

To tell the truth, the good lady's opinion had been not a little influenced by her brother-in-law's appeal to her better understanding, and his implied compliment to her high deserts; and although she had dearly loved her husband, and still doted on her children, he had struck so successfully on one of those little jarring chords in the human heart (Ralph was well acquainted with its worst weaknesses, though he knew nothing of its best), that she had already begun seriously to consider herself the amiable and suffering victim of her late husband's imprudence.

CHAPTER IV.

NICHOLAS AND HIS UNCLE (TO SECURE THE FORTUNE WITHOUT LOSS OF TIME) WAIT UPON MR. WACKFORD SQUEERS, THE YORKSHIRE SCHOOLMASTER.

SNOW HILL! What kind of place can the quiet townspeople who see the words emblazoned, in all the legibility of gilt letters and dark shading, on the north-country coaches, take Snow Hill to be? All people have some undefined and shadowy notion of a place whose name is frequently before their eyes, or often in their ears. What a vast number of random ideas there must be perpetually floating about regarding this same Snow Hill! The name is such a good one. Snow Hill—Snow Hill, too, coupled with a Saracen's Head: picturing to us, by a double association of ideas, something stern and rugged! A bleak desolate tract of country, open to piercing blasts and fierce wintry storms—a dark, cold, gloomy heath, lonely by day, and scarcely to be thought of by honest folks at night—a place which solitary wayfarers shun, and where desperate robbers congregate;—this, or something like this, should be the prevalent notion of Snow Hill in those remote and rustic parts through which the Saracen's Head, like some grim apparition, rushes each day and night with mysterious and ghost-like punctuality; holding its swift and headlong course in all weathers, and seeming to bid defiance to the very elements themselves.

The reality is rather different, but by no means to be despised notwithstanding. There, at the very core of London, in the heart of its business and animation, in the midst of a whirl of noise and motion: stemming as it were the giant currents of life that flow ceaselessly on from different quarters, and meet beneath its walls: stands Newgate; and in that crowded street on which it frowns so darkly—within a few feet of the squalid tottering houses—upon the very spot on which the vendors of soup and fish and damaged fruit are now plying their trades—scores of human beings, amidst a roar of sounds to which even the tumult of a great city is as nothing, four, six, or eight strong men at a time have been hurried violently and swiftly from the world, when the scene has been rendered frightful with excess of human life; when curious eyes have glared from casement and housetop, and wall and pillar; and when, in the mass of white and upturned faces, the dying wretch, in his all-comprehensive look of

agony, has met not one—not one—that bore the impress of pity or compassion.

Near to the gaol, and by consequence near to Smithfield also, and the Compter, and the bustle and noise of the City; and just on that particular part of Snow Hill where omnibus horses going eastward seriously think of falling down on purpose, and where horses in hackney cabriolets going westward not unfrequently fall by accident, is the coach-yard of the Saracen's Head Inn; its portal guarded by two Saracens' heads and shoulders, which it was once the pride and glory of the choice spirits of this metropolis to pull down at night, but which have for some time remained in undisturbed tranquillity; possibly because this species of humour is now confined to St. James's parish, where door-knockers are preferred as being more portable, and bell-wires esteemed as convenient toothpicks. Whether this be the reason or not, there they are, frowning upon you from each side of the gateway. The inn itself, garnished with another Saracen's Head, frowns upon you from the top of the yard; while from the door of the hind boot of all the red coaches that are standing therein, there glares a small Saracen's Head, with a twin expression to the large Saracens' Heads below, so that the general appearance of the pile is decidedly of the Saracenic order.

When you walk up this yard you will see the booking-office on your left, and the tower of St. Sepulchre's Church, darting abruptly up into the sky, on your right, and a gallery of bedrooms on both sides. Just before you, you will observe a long window with the words "Coffee-room" legibly painted above it; and, looking out of that window, you would have seen in addition, if you had gone at the right time, Mr. Wackford Squeers, with his hands in his pockets.

Mr. Squeers's appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental; being of a greenish grey, and in shape resembling the fanlight of a street-door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of scholastic black; but his coat-sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable.

Mr. Squeers was standing in a box by one of the coffee-room fire-places, fitted with one such table as is usually seen in coffee-rooms, and two of extraordinary shapes and dimensions made to suit the angles of the partition. In a corner of the seat was a very small deal trunk, tied round with a scanty piece of cord; and on the trunk was perched—his lace-up half-boots and corduroy trousers dangling in the air—a diminutive boy, with his shoulders drawn up to his ears, and his hands planted on his knees, who glanced timidly at the schoolmaster, from time to time, with evident dread and apprehension.

"Half-past three," muttered Mr. Squeers, turning from the window, and looking sulkily at the coffee-room clock. "There will be nobody here to-day."

Much vexed by this reflection, Mr. Squeers looked at the little boy to see whether he was doing anything he could beat him for. As he happened not to be doing anything at all, he merely boxed his ears, and told him not to do it again.

"At midsummer," muttered Mr. Squeers, resuming his complaint, "I took down ten boys; ten twenties is two hundred pound. I go back at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and have got only three—three oughts is an ought—three twos is six—sixty pound. What's come of all the boys? what's parents got in their heads? what does it all mean?"

Here the little boy on the top of the trunk gave a violent sneeze.

"Hallo, sir!" growled the schoolmaster, turning round. "What's that, sir?"

"Nothing, please, sir," replied the little boy.

"Nothing, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Squeers.

"Please, sir, I sneezed," rejoined the boy, trembling till the little trunk shook under him.

"Oh! sneezed, did you?" retorted Mr. Squeers. "Then what did you say 'Nothing' for, sir?"

In default of a better answer to this question, the little boy screwed a couple of knuckles into each of his eyes and began to cry, wherefore Mr. Squeers knocked him off the trunk with a blow on one side of the face, and knocked him on again with a blow on the other.

"Wait till I get you down into Yorkshire, my young gentleman," said Mr. Squeers, "and then I'll give you the rest. Will you hold that noise, sir?"

"Ye—ye—yes," sobbed the little boy, rubbing his face very hard with the Beggar's Petition in printed calico.

"Then do so at once, sir," said Squeers. "Do you hear?"

As this admonition was accompanied with a threatening gesture, and uttered with a savage aspect, the little boy rubbed his face harder, as if to keep the tears back; and, beyond alternately sniffing and choking, gave no further vent to his emotions.

"Mr. Squeers," said the waiter, looking in at this juncture, "here's a gentleman asking for you at the bar."

"Show the gentleman in, Richard," replied Mr. Squeers in a soft voice. "Put your handkerchief in your pocket, you little scoundrel, or I'll murder you when the gentleman goes."

The schoolmaster had scarcely uttered these words in a fierce whisper when the stranger entered. Affecting not to see him, Mr. Squeers feigned to be intent upon mending a pen, and offering benevolent advice to his youthful pupil.

"My dear child," said Mr. Squeers, "all people have their trials. This early trial of yours that is fit to make your little heart burst, and your very eyes come out of your head with crying, what is it? Nothing; less than nothing. You are leaving your friends, but you will have a father in me, my dear, and a mother in Mrs. Squeers. At the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries——"

"It *is* the gentleman," observed the stranger, stopping the schoolmaster in the rehearsal of his advertisement. "Mr. Squeers, I believe, sir?"

"The same, sir," said Mr. Squeers with an assumption of extreme surprise.

"The gentleman," said the stranger, "that advertised in the Times newspaper?"

"—Morning Post, Chronicle, Herald, and Advertiser, regarding the Academy called Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire," added Mr. Squeers. "You come on business, sir. I see by my young friends. How do you do, my little gentleman? and how do *you* do, sir?" With this salutation Mr. Squeers patted the heads of two hollow-eyed, small-boned little boys, whom the applicant had brought with him, and waited for further communications.

"I am in the oil and colour way. My name is Snawley, sir," said the stranger.

Squeers inclined his head as much as to say, "And a remarkably pretty name, too."

The stranger continued. "I have been thinking, Mr. Squeers, of placing my two boys at your school."

"It is not for me to say so, sir," replied Mr. Squeers, "but I don't think you could possibly do a better thing."

"Hem!" said the other. "Twenty pounds per annewum, I believe, Mr. Squeers?"

"Guineas," rejoined the schoolmaster with a persuasive smile.

"Pounds for two, I think, Mr. Squeers," said Mr. Snawley solemnly.

"I don't think it could be done, sir," replied Squeers, as if he had never considered the proposition before. "Let me see; four fives is twenty, double that, and deduct the—— Well, a pound either way shall not stand betwixt us. You must recommend me to your connection, sir, and make it up that way."

"They are not great eaters," said Mr. Snawley.

"Oh! that doesn't matter at all," replied Squeers. "We don't consider the boys' appetites at our establishment." This was strictly true; they did not.

"Every wholesome luxury, sir, that Yorkshire can afford," continued Squeers; "every beautiful moral that Mrs. Squeers can instil; every—in short, every comfort of a home that a boy could wish for, will be theirs, Mr. Snawley."

"I should wish their morals to be particularly attended to," said Mr. Snawley.

"I am glad of that, sir," replied the schoolmaster, drawing himself up. "They have come to the right shop for morals, sir."

"You are a moral man yourself," said Mr. Snawley.

"I rather believe I am, sir," replied Squeers.

"I have the satisfaction to know you are, sir," said Mr. Snawley. "I asked one of your references, and he said you were pious."

"Well, sir, I hope I am a little in that line," replied Squeers.

"I hope I am also," rejoined the other. "Could I say a few words with you in the next box?"

"By all means," rejoined Squeers with a grin. "My dears, will you speak to your new playfellow a minute or two? That is one of my boys, sir. Belling his name is,—a Taunton boy that, sir."

"Is he, indeed?" rejoined Mr. Snawley, looking at the poor little urchin as if he were some extraordinary natural curiosity.

"He goes down with me to-morrow, sir," said

Squeers. "That's his luggage that he is a sitting upon now. Each boy is required to bring, sir, two suits of clothes, six shirts, six pair of stockings, two nightcaps, two pocket-handkerchiefs, two pair of shoes, two hats, and a razor."

"A razor!" exclaimed Mr. Snawley as they walked into the next box. "What for?"

"To shave with," replied Squeers in a slow and measured tone.

There was not much in these three words, but there must have been something in the manner in which they were said to attract attention; for the schoolmaster and his companion looked steadily at each other for a few seconds, and then exchanged a very meaning smile. Snawley was a sleek, flat-nosed man, clad in sombre garments, and long black gaiters, and bearing in his countenance an expression of much mortification and sanctity; so, his smiling without any obvious reason was the more remarkable.

"Up to what age do you keep boys at your school, then?" he asked at length.

"Just as long as their friends make the quarterly payments to my agent in town, or until such time as they run away," replied Squeers. "Let us understand each other; I see we may safely do so. What are these boys; —natural children?"

"No," rejoined Snawley, meeting the gaze of the schoolmaster's one eye. "They ain't."

"I thought they might be," said Squeers coolly. "We have a good many of them; that boy's one."

"Him in the next box?" said Snawley.

Squeers nodded in the affirmative; his companion took another peep at the little boy on the trunk, and, turning round again, looked as if he were quite disappointed to see him so much like other boys, and said he should hardly have thought it.

"He is," cried Squeers. "But about these boys of yours; you wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes," replied Snawley. "The fact is, I am not their father, Mr. Squeers. I'm only their father-in-law."

"Oh! Is that it?" said the schoolmaster. "That explains it at once. I was wondering what the devil you were going to send them to Yorkshire for. Ha! ha! Oh! I understand now."

"You see I have married the mother," pursued Snawley; "it's expensive keeping boys at home, and, as she has a little money in her own right, I am afraid (women are so very foolish, Mr. Squeers) that she might be led to squander it on them, which would be their ruin, you know."

"*I* see," returned Squeers, throwing himself back in his chair, and waving his hand.

"And this," resumed Snawley, "has made me anxious to put them to some school a good distance off, where there are no holidays—none of those ill-judged comings home twice a year that unsettle children's minds so—and where they may rough it a little—you comprehend?"

"The payments regular, and no questions asked," said Squeers, nodding his head.

"That's it exactly," rejoined the other. "Morals strictly attended to, though."

"Strictly," said Squeers.

"Not too much writing home allowed, I suppose?" said the father-in-law, hesitating.

"None, except a circular at Christmas, to say they never were so happy, and hope they may never be sent for," rejoined Squeers.

"Nothing could be better," said the father-in-law, rubbing his hands.

"Then, as we understand each other," said Squeers, "will you allow me to ask you whether you consider me a highly virtuous, exemplary, and well-conducted man in private life; and whether, as a person whose business it is to take charge of youth, you place the strongest confidence in my unimpeachable integrity, liberality, religious principles, and ability?"

"Certainly I do," replied the father-in-law, reciprocating the schoolmaster's grin.

"Perhaps you won't object to say that, if I make you a reference?"

"Not the least in the world."

"That's your sort!" said Squeers, taking up a pen; "this is doing business, and that's what I like."

Having entered Mr. Snawley's address, the schoolmaster had next to perform the still more agreeable office of entering the receipt of the first quarter's payment in advance, which he had scarcely completed, when another voice was heard inquiring for Mr. Squeers.

"Here he is," replied the schoolmaster: "what is it?"

"Only a matter of business, sir," said Ralph Nickleby, presenting himself, closely followed by Nicholas. "There was an advertisement of yours in the papers this morning?"

"There was, sir. This way if you please," said Squeers, who had by this time got back to the box by the fire-place. "Won't you be seated?"

"Why, I think I will," replied Ralph, suiting the action to the word, and placing his hat on

the table before him. "This is my nephew, sir, Mr. Nicholas Nickleby."

"How do you do, sir?" said Squeers.

Nicholas bowed, said he was very well, and seemed very much astonished at the outward appearance of the proprietor of Dotheboys Hall: as indeed he was.

"Perhaps you recollect me?" said Ralph, looking narrowly at the schoolmaster.

"You paid me a small account at each of my half-yearly visits to town, for some years, I think, sir," replied Squeers.

"I did," rejoined Ralph.

"For the parents of a boy named Dorker, who unfortunately——"

"—Unfortunately died at Dotheboys Hall," said Ralph, finishing the sentence.

"I remember very well, sir," rejoined Squeers. "Ah! Mrs. Squeers, sir, was as partial to that lad as if he had been her own; the attention, sir, that was bestowed upon that boy in his illness! Dry toast and warm tea offered him every night and morning when he couldn't swallow anything—a candle in his bedroom on the very night he died—the best dictionary sent up for him to lay his head upon—I don't regret it, though. It is a pleasant thing to reflect that one did one's duty by him."

Ralph smiled, as if he meant anything but smiling, and looked round at the strangers present.

"These are only some pupils of mine," said Wackford Squeers, pointing to the little boy on the trunk and the two little boys on the floor, who had been staring at each other without uttering a word, and writhing their bodies into most remarkable contortions, according to the custom of little boys when they first become acquainted. "This gentleman, sir, is a parent who is kind enough to compliment me upon the course of education adopted at Dotheboys Hall, which is situated, sir, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket money——"

"Yes, we know all about that, sir," interrupted Ralph testily. "It's in the advertisement."

"You are very right, sir; it *is* in the advertisement," replied Squeers.

"And in the matter of fact besides," interrupted Mr. Snawley. "I feel bound to assure you, sir, and I am proud to have this opportunity *of* assuring you, that I consider Mr. Squeers a gentleman highly virtuous, exemplary, well conducted, and——"

"I make no doubt of it, sir," interrupted Ralph, checking the torrent of recommendation; "no doubt of it at all. Suppose we come to business?"

"With all my heart, sir," rejoined Squeers. "'Never postpone business' is the very first lesson we instil into our commercial pupils. Master Belling, my dear, always remember that; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Master Belling.

"He recollects what it is, does he?" said Ralph.

"Tell the gentleman," said Squeers.

"Never," repeated Master Belling.

"Very good," said Squeers; "go on."

"Never," repeated Master Belling again.

"Very good indeed," said Squeers. "Yes."

"P," suggested Nicholas good-naturedly.

"Perform—business!" said Master Belling. "Never—perform—business!"

"Very well, sir," said Squeers, darting a withering look at the culprit. "You and I will perform a little business on our private account by-and-by."

"And just now," said Ralph, "we had better transact our own, perhaps."

"If you please," said Squeers.

"Well," resumed Ralph, "it's brief enough; soon broached; and I hope easily concluded. You have advertised for an able assistant, sir?"

"Precisely so," said Squeers.

"And you really want one?"

"Certainly," answered Squeers.

"Here he is!" said Ralph. "My nephew Nicholas, hot from school, with everything he learnt there fermenting in his head, and nothing fermenting in his pocket, is just the man you want."

"I am afraid," said Squeers, perplexed with such an application from a youth of Nicholas's figure, "I am afraid the young man won't suit me."

"Yes, he will," said Ralph; "I know better. Don't be cast down, sir; you will be teaching all the young noblemen in Dotheboys Hall in less than a week's time, unless this gentleman is more obstinate than I take him to be."

"I fear, sir," said Nicholas, addressing Mr. Squeers, "that you object to my youth, and to my not being a Master of Arts?"

"The absence of a college degree *is* an objection," replied Squeers, looking as grave as he could, and considerably puzzled, no less by the contrast between the simplicity of the nephew and the worldly manner of the uncle, than by the incomprehensible allusion to the young noblemen under his tuition.

"Look here, sir," said Ralph; "I'll put this matter in its true light in two seconds."

"If you'll have the goodness," rejoined Squeers.

"This is a boy, or a youth, or a lad, or a young man, or a hobbledehoy, or whatever you like to call him, of eighteen or nineteen, or thereabouts," said Ralph.

"That I see," observed the schoolmaster.

"So do I," said Mr. Snawley, thinking it as well to back his new friend occasionally.

"His father is dead, he is wholly ignorant of the world, has no resources whatever, and wants something to do," said Ralph. "I recommend him to this splendid establishment of yours, as an opening which will lead him to fortune if he turns it to proper account. Do you see that?"

"Everybody must see that," replied Squeers, half imitating the sneer with which the old gentleman was regarding his unconscious relative.

"I do, of course," said Nicholas eagerly.

"He does, of course, you observe," said Ralph in the same dry, hard manner. "If any caprice of temper should induce him to cast aside this golden opportunity before he has brought it to perfection, I consider myself absolved from extending any assistance to his mother and sister. Look at him, and think of the use he may be to you in half-a-dozen ways! Now, the question is, whether, for some time to come at all events, he won't serve your purpose better than twenty of the kind of people you would get under ordinary circumstances. Isn't that a question for consideration?"

"Yes, it is," said Squeers, answering a nod of Ralph's head with a nod of his own.

"Good," rejoined Ralph. "Let me have two words with you."

The two words were had apart: in a couple of minutes Mr. Wackford Squeers announced that Mr. Nicholas Nickleby was, from that moment, thoroughly nominated to, and installed in, the office of first assistant master at Dotheboys Hall.

"Your uncle's recommendation has done it, Mr. Nickleby," said Wackford Squeers.

Nicholas, overjoyed at his success, shook his uncle's hand warmly, and could almost have worshipped Squeers upon the spot.

"He is an odd-looking man," thought Nicholas. "What of that? Porson was an odd-looking man, and so was Doctor Johnson; all these bookworms are."

"At eight o'clock to-morrow morning, Mr. Nickleby," said Squeers, "the coach starts. You must be here at a quarter before, as we take these boys with us."

"Certainly, sir," said Nicholas.

"And your fare down I have paid," growled Ralph. "So you'll have nothing to do but keep yourself warm."

Here was another instance of his uncle's generosity! Nicholas felt his unexpected kindness so much, that he could scarcely find words to thank him; indeed, he had not found half enough, when they took leave of the schoolmaster, and emerged from the Saracen's Head gateway.

"I shall be here in the morning to see you fairly off," said Ralph. "No skulking!"

"Thank you, sir," replied Nicholas; "I never shall forget this kindness."

"Take care you don't," replied his uncle. "You had better go home now, and pack up what you have got to pack. Do you think you could find your way to Golden Square first?"

"Certainly," said Nicholas. "I can easily inquire."

"Leave these papers with my clerk, then," said Ralph, producing a small parcel, "and tell him to wait till I come home."

Nicholas cheerfully undertook the errand, and bidding his worthy uncle an affectionate farewell, which that warm-hearted old gentleman acknowledged by a growl, hastened away to execute his commission.

He found Golden Square in due course; Mr. Noggs, who had stepped out for a minute or so to the public-house, was opening the door with a latch-key as he reached the steps.

"What's that?" inquired Noggs, pointing to the parcel.

"Papers from my uncle," replied Nicholas; "and you're to have the goodness to wait till he comes home, if you please."

"Uncle!" cried Noggs.

"Mr. Nickleby," said Nicholas in explanation.

"Come in," said Newman.

Without another word he led Nicholas into the passage, and thence into the official pantry at the end of it, where he thrust him into a chair, and, mounting upon his high stool, sat, with his arms hanging straight down by his sides, gazing fixedly upon him, as from a tower of observation.

"There is no answer," said Nicholas, laying the parcel on a table beside him.

Newman said nothing, but folding his arms, and thrusting his head forward so as to obtain a nearer view of Nicholas's face, scanned his features closely.

"No answer," said Nicholas, speaking very loud, under the impression that Newman Noggs was deaf.

Newman placed his hands upon his knees, and, without uttering a syllable, continued the same close scrutiny of his companion's face.

This was such a very singular proceeding on the part of an utter stranger, and his appearance was so extremely peculiar, that Nicholas, who

"SNUBS AND ROMANS ARE PLENTIFUL ENOUGH, AND THERE ARE FLATS OF ALL SORTS AND SIZES WHEN THERE'S A MEETING AT EXETER HALL."

had a sufficiently keen sense of the ridiculous, could not refrain from breaking into a smile as he inquired whether Mr. Noggs had any commands for him.

Noggs shook his head and sighed; upon which Nicholas rose, and, remarking that he required no rest, bade him good morning.

It was a great exertion for Newman Noggs, and nobody knows to this day how he ever came to make it, the other party being wholly unknown to him, but he drew a long breath, and actually

said, out loud, without once stopping, that if the young gentleman did not object to tell, he should like to know what his uncle was going to do for him.

Nicholas had not the least objection in the world, but, on the contrary, was rather pleased to have an opportunity of talking on the subject which occupied his thoughts; so, he sat down again, and (his sanguine imagination warming as he spoke) entered into a fervent and glowing description of all the honours and advantages to be derived from his appointment at that seat of learning, Dotheboys Hall.

"But, what's the matter—are you ill?" said Nicholas, suddenly breaking off, as his companion, after throwing himself into a variety of uncouth attitudes, thrust his hands under the stool, and cracked his finger joints as if he were snapping all the bones in his hands.

Newman Noggs made no reply, but went on shrugging his shoulders and cracking his finger joints; smiling horribly all the time, and looking steadfastly at nothing, out of the tops of his eyes, in a most ghastly manner.

At first Nicholas thought the mysterious man was in a fit, but, on further consideration, decided that he was in liquor, under which circumstances he deemed it prudent to make off at once. He looked back when he had got the street-door open. Newman Noggs was still indulging in the same extraordinary gestures, and the cracking of his fingers sounded louder than ever.

CHAPTER V.

NICHOLAS STARTS FOR YORKSHIRE. OF HIS LEAVE-TAKING AND HIS FELLOW-TRAVELLERS, AND WHAT BEFELL THEM ON THE ROAD.

IF tears dropped into a trunk were charms to preserve its owner from sorrow and misfortune, Nicholas Nickleby would have commenced his expedition under most happy auspices. There was so much to be done, and so little time to do it in; so many kind words to be spoken, and such bitter pain in the hearts in which they rose to impede their utterance; that the little preparations for his journey were made mournfully indeed. A hundred things which the anxious care of his mother and sister deemed indispensable for his comfort, Nicholas insisted on leaving behind, as they might prove of some after use, or might be convertible into money if occasion required. A hundred affectionate contests on such points as these took place on the sad night which preceded his departure; and, as the termination of every angerless dispute brought them nearer and nearer to the close of their slight preparations, Kate grew busier and busier, and wept more silently.

The box was packed at last, and then there came supper, with some little delicacy provided for the occasion, and as a set-off against the expense of which Kate and her mother had feigned to dine when Nicholas was out. The poor lad nearly choked himself by attempting to partake of it, and almost suffocated himself in affecting a jest or two, and forcing a melancholy laugh. Thus, they lingered on till the hour of separating for the night was long past; and then they found that they might as well have given vent to their real feelings before, for they could not suppress them, do what they would. So, they let them have their way, and even that was a relief.

Nicholas slept well till six next morning; dreamed of home, or of what was home once—no matter which, for things that are changed or gone will come back as they used to be, thank God! in sleep—and rose quite brisk and gay. He wrote a few lines in pencil, to say the good-bye which he was afraid to pronounce himself, and laying them, with half his scanty stock of money, at his sister's door, shouldered his box and crept softly down-stairs.

"Is that you, Hannah?" cried a voice from Miss La Creevy's sitting-room, whence shone the light of a feeble candle.

"It is I, Miss La Creevy," said Nicholas, putting down the box and looking in.

"Bless us!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy, starting and putting her hand to her curl papers. "You're up very early, Mr. Nickleby."

"So are you," replied Nicholas.

"It's the fine arts that bring me out of bed, Mr. Nickleby," returned the lady. "I'm waiting for the light to carry out an idea."

Miss La Creevy had got up early to put a fancy nose into a miniature of an ugly little boy, destined for his grandmother in the country, who was expected to bequeath him property if he was like the family.

"To carry out an idea," repeated Miss La Creevy; "and that's the great convenience of living in a thoroughfare like the Strand. When I want a nose or an eye for any particular sitter, I have only to look out of window and wait till I get one."

"Does it take long to get a nose, now?" inquired Nicholas, smiling.

"Why, that depends in a great measure on the pattern," replied Miss La Creevy. "Snubs and Romans are plentiful enough, and there are flats of all sorts and sizes when there's a meeting at Exeter Hall; but perfect aquilines, I am sorry to say, are scarce, and we generally use them for uniforms or public characters."

"Indeed!" said Nicholas. "If I should meet with any in my travels, I'll endeavour to sketch them for you."

"You don't mean to say that you are really going all the way down into Yorkshire this cold winter's weather, Mr. Nickleby?" said Miss La Creevy. "I heard something of it last night."

"I do, indeed," replied Nicholas. "Needs must, you know, when somebody drives. Necessity is my driver, and that is only another name for the same gentleman."

"Well, I am very sorry for it; that's all I can say," said Miss La Creevy; "as much on your mother's and sister's account as on yours. Your sister is a very pretty young lady, Mr. Nickleby, and that is an additional reason why she should have somebody to protect her. I persuaded her to give me a sitting or two for the street-door case. Ah! she'll make a sweet miniature." As Miss La Creevy spoke, she held up an ivory countenance intersected with very perceptible sky-blue veins, and regarded it with so much complacency, that Nicholas quite envied her.

"If you ever have an opportunity of showing Kate some little kindness," said Nicholas, presenting his hand, "I think you will."

"Depend upon that," said the good-natured miniature painter; "and God bless you, Mr. Nickleby; and I wish you well."

It was very little that Nicholas knew of the world, but he guessed enough about its ways to think that, if he gave Miss La Creevy one little kiss, perhaps she might not be the less kindly disposed towards those he was leaving behind. So, he gave her three or four with a kind of jocose gallantry, and Miss La Creevy evinced no greater symptoms of displeasure than declaring, as she adjusted her yellow turban, that she had never heard of such a thing, and couldn't have believed it possible.

Having terminated the unexpected interview in this satisfactory manner, Nicholas hastily withdrew himself from the house. By the time he had found a man to carry his box it was only seven o'clock, so he walked slowly on, a little in advance of the porter, and very probably with not half as light a heart in his breast as the man had, although he had no waistcoat to cover it with, and had evidently, from the appearance of his other garments, been spending the night in a stable, and taking his breakfast at a pump.

Regarding, with no small curiosity and interest, all the busy preparations for the coming day which every street and almost every house displayed; and thinking, now and then, that it seemed rather hard that so many people of all ranks and stations could earn a livelihood in London, and that he should be compelled to journey so far in search of one; Nicholas speedily arrived at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. Having dismissed his attendant, and seen the box safely deposited in the coach-office, he looked into the coffee-room in search of Mr. Squeers.

He found that learned gentleman sitting at breakfast, with the three little boys before noticed, and two others who had turned up by some lucky chance since the interview of the previous day, ranged in a row on the opposite seat. Mr. Squeers had before him a small measure of coffee, a plate of hot toast, and a cold round of beef; but he was at that moment intent on preparing breakfast for the little boys.

"This is two-penn'orth of milk, is it, waiter?" said Mr. Squeers, looking down into a large blue mug, and slanting it gently, so as to get an accurate view of the quantity of liquid contained in it.

"That's two-penn'orth, sir," replied the waiter.

"What a rare article milk is, to be sure, in London!" said Mr. Squeers with a sigh. "Just fill that mug up with lukewarm water, William, will you?"

"To the wery top, sir?" inquired the waiter. "Why, the milk will be drownded."

"Never you mind that," replied Mr. Squeers. "Serve it right for being so dear. You ordered that thick bread-and-butter for three, did you?"

"Coming directly, sir."

"You needn't hurry yourself," said Squeers; "there's plenty of time. Conquer your passions, boys, and don't be eager after vittles." As he uttered this moral precept, Mr. Squeers took a large bite out of the cold beef, and recognised Nicholas.

"Sit down, Mr. Nickleby," said Squeers. "Here we are, a breakfasting, you see!"

Nicholas did *not* see that anybody was breakfasting, except Mr. Squeers; but he bowed with all becoming reverence, and looked as cheerful as he could.

"Oh! that's the milk-and-water, is it, William?" said Squeers. "Very good; don't forget the bread-and-butter presently."

At this fresh mention of the bread-and-butter, the five little boys looked very eager, and followed the waiter out with their eyes: meanwhile, Mr. Squeers tasted the milk-and-water.

"Ah!" said that gentleman, smacking his lips, "here's richness! Think of the many beggars and orphans in the streets that would be glad of this, little boys. A shocking thing hunger, isn't it, Mr. Nickleby?"

"Very shocking, sir," said Nicholas.

"When I say number one," pursued Mr. Squeers, putting the mug before the children, "the boy on the left hand nearest the window may take a drink; and when I say number two, the boy next him will go in, and so till we come to number five, which is the last boy. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," cried all the little boys with great eagerness.

"That's right," said Squeers, calmly getting on with his breakfast; "keep ready till I tell you to begin. Subdue your appetites, my dears, and you've conquered human natur'. This is the way we inculcate strength of mind, Mr. Nickleby," said the schoolmaster, turning to Nicholas, and speaking with his mouth very full of beef and toast.

Nicholas murmured something—he knew not what—in reply; and the little boys, dividing their gaze between the mug, the bread-and-butter (which had by this time arrived), and every morsel which Mr. Squeers took into his mouth, remained with strained eyes in torments of expectation.

"Thank God for a good breakfast," said Squeers when he had finished. "Number one may take a drink."

Number one seized the mug ravenously, and had just drunk enough to make him wish for more, when Mr. Squeers gave the signal for number two, who gave up at the same interesting moment to number three; and the process was repeated until the milk-and-water terminated with number five.

"And now," said the schoolmaster, dividing the bread-and-butter for three into as many portions as there were children, "you had better look sharp with your breakfast, for the horn will blow in a minute or two, and then every boy leaves off."

Permission being thus given to fall-to, the boys began to eat voraciously, and in desperate haste: while the schoolmaster (who was in high good-humour after his meal) picked his teeth with a fork, and looked smilingly on. In a very short time the horn was heard.

"I thought it wouldn't be long," said Squeers, jumping up and producing a little basket from under the seat; "put what you haven't had time to eat in here, boys! You'll want it on the road!"

Nicholas was considerably startled by these very economical arrangements; but he had no time to reflect upon them, for the little boys had to be got up to the top of the coach, and their boxes had to be brought out and put in, and Mr. Squeers's luggage was to be seen carefully deposited in the boot, and all these offices were in his department. He was in the full heat and bustle of concluding these operations, when his uncle, Mr. Ralph Nickleby, accosted him.

"Oh! here you are, sir!" said Ralph. "Here are your mother and sister, sir."

"Where?" cried Nicholas, looking hastily round.

"Here!" replied his uncle. "Having too much money, and nothing at all to do with it, they were paying a hackney coach as I came up, sir."

"We were afraid of being too late to see him before he went away from us," said Mrs. Nickleby, embracing her son, heedless of the unconcerned lookers-on in the coach-yard.

"Very good, ma'am," returned Ralph; "you're the best judge, of course. I merely said that you were paying a hackney coach. *I* never pay a hackney coach, ma'am; I never hire one. I haven't been in a hackney coach of my own hiring for thirty years, and I hope I shan't be for thirty more, if I live as long."

"I should never have forgiven myself if I had not seen him," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Poor dear boy—going away without his breakfast, too, because he feared to distress us!"

"Mighty fine certainly," said Ralph with great testiness. "When I first went to business, ma'am, I took a penny loaf and a ha'porth of milk for my breakfast as I walked to the City every morning; what do you say to that, ma'am? Breakfast! Bah!"

"Now, Nickleby," said Squeers, coming up at the moment buttoning his great-coat; "I think you'd better get up behind. I'm afraid of one of them boys falling off, and then there's twenty pound a year gone."

"Dear Nicholas," whispered Kate, touching her brother's arm, "who is that vulgar man?"

"Eh?" growled Ralph, whose quick ears had caught the inquiry. "Do you wish to be introduced to Mr. Squeers, my dear?"

"That the schoolmaster! No, uncle. Oh no!" replied Kate, shrinking back.

"I'm sure I heard you say as much, my dear," retorted Ralph in his cold sarcastic manner. "Mr. Squeers, here's my niece: Nicholas's sister!"

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, miss," said Squeers, raising his hat an inch or two.

"I wish Mrs. Squeers took gals, and we had you for a teacher. I don't know, though, whether she mightn't grow jealous if we had. Ha! ha! ha!"

If the proprietor of Dotheboys Hall could have known what was passing in his assistant's breast at that moment, he would have discovered, with some surprise, that he was as near being soundly pummelled as he had ever been in his life. Kate Nickleby, having a quicker perception of her brother's emotions, led him gently

"VERY GLAD TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, MISS," SAID SQUEERS, RAISING HIS HAT AN INCH OR TWO

aside, and thus prevented Mr. Squeers from being impressed with the fact in a peculiarly disagreeable manner.

"My dear Nicholas," said the young lady, "who is this man? What kind of place can it be that you are going to?"

"I hardly know, Kate," replied Nicholas, pressing his sister's hand. "I suppose the Yorkshire folks are rather rough and uncultivated; that's all."

"But this person," urged Kate.

"Is my employer, or master, or whatever the proper name may be," replied Nicholas quickly; "and I was an ass to take his coarseness ill. They

are looking this way, and it is time I was in my place. Bless you, love, and good-bye! Mother, look forward to our meeting again some day! Uncle, farewell! Thank you heartily for all you have done and all you mean to do. Quite ready, sir!"

With these hasty adieux, Nicholas mounted nimbly to his seat, and waved his hand as gallantly as if his heart went with it.

At this moment, when the coachman and guard were comparing notes, for the last time before starting, on the subject of the way-bill; when porters were screwing out the last reluctant sixpences, itinerant newsmen making the last offer of a morning paper, and the horses giving the last impatient rattle to their harness; Nicholas felt somebody pulling softly at his leg. He looked down, and there stood Newman Noggs, who pushed up into his hand a dirty letter.

"What's this?" inquired Nicholas.

"Hush!" rejoined Noggs, pointing to Mr. Ralph Nickleby, who was saying a few earnest words to Squeers, a short distance off. "Take it. Read it. Nobody knows. That's all."

"Stop!" cried Nicholas.

"No," replied Noggs.

Nicholas cried "Stop!" again, but Newman Noggs was gone.

A minute's bustle, a banging of the coach doors, a swaying of the vehicle to one side, as the heavy coachman, and still heavier guard, climbed into their seats; a cry of all right, a few notes from the horn, a hasty glance of two sorrowful faces below, and the hard features of Mr. Ralph Nickleby—and the coach was gone too, and rattling over the stones of Smithfield.

The little boys' legs being too short to admit of their feet resting upon anything as they sat, and the little boys' bodies being consequently in imminent hazard of being jerked off the coach, Nicholas had enough to do over the stones to hold them on. Between the manual exertion and the mental anxiety attendant upon this task, he was not a little relieved when the coach stopped at the Peacock at Islington. He was still more relieved when a hearty-looking gentleman, with a very good-humoured face, and a very fresh colour, got up behind, and proposed to take the other corner of the seat.

"If we put some of these youngsters in the middle," said the new-comer, "they'll be safer in case of their going to sleep; eh?"

"If you'll have the goodness, sir," replied Squeers, "that'll be the very thing. Mr. Nickleby, take three of them boys between you and the gentleman. Belling and the youngest Snawley can sit between me and the guard. Three children," said Squeers, explaining to the stranger, "books as two."

"I have not the least objection I am sure," said the fresh-coloured gentleman; "I have a brother who wouldn't object to book his six children as two at any butcher's or baker's in the kingdom, I dare say. Far from it."

"Six children, sir?" exclaimed Squeers.

"Yes, and all boys," replied the stranger.

"Mr. Nickleby," said Squeers in great haste, "catch hold of that basket. Let me give you a card, sir, of an establishment where those six boys can be brought up in an enlightened, liberal, and moral manner, with no mistake at all about it, for twenty guineas a year each—twenty guineas, sir—or I'd take all the boys together upon a average right through, and say a hundred pound a year for the lot."

"Oh!" said the gentleman, glancing at the card, "you are the Mr. Squeers mentioned here, I presume?"

"Yes, I am, sir," replied the worthy pedagogue; "Mr. Wackford Squeers is my name, and I'm very far from being ashamed of it. These are some of my boys, sir; that's one of my assistants, sir—Mr. Nickleby, a gentleman's son, and a good scholar, mathematical, classical, and commercial. We don't do things by halves at our shop. All manner of learning my boys take down, sir; the expense is never thought of; and they get paternal treatment and washing in."

"Upon my word," said the gentleman, glancing at Nicholas with a half-smile, and a more than half-expression of surprise, "these are advantages indeed."

"You may say that, sir," rejoined Squeers, thrusting his hands into his great-coat pockets. "The most unexceptionable references are given and required. I wouldn't take a reference with any boy that wasn't responsible for the payment of five pound five a quarter, no, not if you went down on your knees, and asked me, with the tears running down your face, to do it."

"Highly considerate," said the passenger.

"It's my great aim and end to be considerate, sir," rejoined Squeers. "Snawley, junior, if you don't leave off chattering your teeth, and shaking with the cold, I'll warm you with a severe thrashing in about half a minute's time."

"Sit fast here, genelmen," said the guard as he clambered up.

"All right behind there, Dick?" cried the coachman.

"All right," was the reply. "Off she goes!" And off she did go—if coaches be feminine—amidst a loud flourish from the guard's horn, and the calm approval of all the judges of

coaches and coach horses congregated at the Peacock, but more especially of the helpers, who stood, with the cloths over their arms, watching the coach till it disappeared, and then lounged admiringly stablewards, bestowing various gruff encomiums on the beauty of the turn-out.

When the guard (who was a stout old Yorkshireman) had blown himself quite out of breath, he put the horn into a little tunnel of a basket fastened to the coach-side for the purpose, and giving himself a plentiful shower of blows on the chest and shoulders, observed it was uncommon cold; after which he demanded of every person separately whether he was going right through, and if not, where he *was* going. Satisfactory replies being made to these queries, he surmised that the roads were pretty heavy arter that fall last night, and took the liberty of asking whether any of them gentlemen carried a snuff-box. It happening that nobody did, he remarked with a mysterious air that he had heard a medical gentleman, as went down to Grantham last week, say how that snuff-taking was bad for the eyes; but for his part he had never found it so, and what he said was, that everybody should speak as they found. Nobody attempting to controvert this position, he took a small brown-paper parcel out of his hat, and putting on a pair of horn spectacles (the writing being crabbed) read the direction half-a-dozen times over; having done which, he consigned the parcel to its old place, put up his spectacles again, and stared at everybody in turn. After this he took another blow at the horn by way of refreshment; and, having now exhausted his usual topics of conversation, folded his arms as well as he could in so many coats, and falling into a solemn silence, looked carelessly at the familiar objects which met his eye on every side as the coach rolled on; the only things he seemed to care for being horses and droves of cattle, which he scrutinised with a critical air as they were passed upon the road.

The weather was intensely and bitterly cold; a great deal of snow fell from time to time; and the wind was intolerably keen. Mr. Squeers got down at almost every stage—to stretch his legs as he said—and, as he always came back from such excursions with a very red nose, and composed himself to sleep directly, there is reason to suppose that he derived great benefit from the process. The little pupils having been stimulated with the remains of their breakfast, and further invigorated by sundry small cups of a curious cordial carried by Mr. Squeers, which tasted very like toast-and-water put into a brandy-bottle by mistake, went to sleep, woke, shivered, and cried, as their feelings prompted. Nicholas and the good-tempered man found so many things to talk about, that between conversing together, and cheering up the boys, the time passed with them as rapidly as it could under such adverse circumstances.

So the day wore on. At Eton Slocomb there was a good coach dinner, of which the box, the four front outsides, the one inside, Nicholas, the good-tempered man, and Mr. Squeers partook; while the five little boys were put to thaw by the fire, and regaled with sandwiches. A stage or two further on, the lamps were lighted, and a great to-do occasioned by the taking up, at a roadside inn, of a very fastidious lady with an infinite variety of cloaks and small parcels, who loudly lamented, for the behoof of the outsides, the non-arrival of her own carriage which was to have taken her on, and made the guard solemnly promise to stop every green chariot he saw coming; which, as it was a dark night and he was sitting with his face the other way, that officer undertook, with many fervent asseverations, to do. Lastly, the fastidious lady, finding there was a solitary gentleman inside, had a small lamp lighted which she carried in her reticule, and being after much trouble shut in, the horses were put into a brisk canter, and the coach was once more in rapid motion.

The night and the snow came on together, and dismal enough they were. There was no sound to be heard but the howling of the wind; for the noise of the wheels, and the tread of the horses' feet, were rendered inaudible by the thick coating of snow which covered the ground, and was fast increasing every moment. The streets of Stamford were deserted as they passed through the town; and its old churches rose, frowning and dark, from the whitened ground. Twenty miles further on, two of the front outside passengers, wisely availing themselves of their arrival at one of the best inns in England, turned in, for the night, at the George at Grantham. The remainder wrapped themselves more closely in their coats and cloaks, and, leaving the light and warmth of the town behind them, pillowed themselves against the luggage, and prepared, with many half-suppressed moans, again to encounter the piercing blast which swept across the open country.

They were little more than a stage out of Grantham, or about half-way between it and Newark, when Nicholas, who had been asleep for a short time, was suddenly roused by a violent jerk, which nearly threw him from his seat. Grasping the rail, he found that the coach had sunk greatly on one side, though it was still

dragged forward by the horses; and while—confused by their plunging and the loud screams of the lady inside—he hesitated, for an instant, whether to jump off or not, the vehicle turned easily over, and relieved him from all further uncertainty by flinging him into the road.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE OCCURRENCE OF THE ACCIDENT MENTIONED IN THE LAST CHAPTER AFFORDS AN OPPORTUNITY TO A COUPLE OF GENTLEMEN TO TELL STORIES AGAINST EACH OTHER.

"WO ho!" cried the guard, on his legs in a minute, and running to the leaders' heads. "Is there ony genelmen there as can len' a hond here? Keep quiet, dang ye! Wo ho!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Nicholas, looking sleepily up.

"Matther, mun! matther eneaf for one neight," replied the guard; "dang the wall-eyed bay, he's gane mad wi' glory I think, carse t'coorch is over. Here, can't ye len' a hond? Dom it, I'd ha' dean it if all my boans were brokken."

"Here!" cried Nicholas, staggering to his feet, "I'm ready. I'm only a little abroad, that's all."

"Hoold 'em toight," cried the guard, "while ar coot treaces. Hang on tiv 'em sumhoo. Weel deane, my lod. That's it. Let 'em goa noo. Dang 'em, they'll gang whoam fast eneaf!"

In truth, the animals were no sooner released than they trotted back, with much deliberation, to the stable they had just left, which was distant not a mile behind.

"Can you blo' a harn?" asked the guard, disengaging one of the coach lamps.

"I dare say I can," replied Nicholas.

"Then just blo' away into that 'un as lies on the grund, fit to wakken the deead, will'ee," said the man, "while I stop sum o' this here squealing inside? Cumin', cumin'. Dean't make that noise, wooman."

As the man spoke, he proceeded to wrench open the uppermost door of the coach, while Nicholas, seizing the horn, awoke the echoes far and wide with one of the most extraordinary performances on that instrument ever heard by mortal ears. It had its effect, however, not only in rousing such of the passengers as were recovering from the stunning effects of their fall, but in summoning assistance to their relief; for lights gleamed in the distance, and people were already astir.

In fact, a man on horseback galloped down before the passengers were well collected together; and a careful investigation being instituted, it appeared that the lady inside had broken her lamp, and the gentleman his head; that the two front outsides had escaped with black eyes; the box with a bloody nose; the coachman with a contusion on the temple; Mr. Squeers with a portmanteau bruise on his back; and the remaining passengers without any injury at all—thanks to the softness of the snow-drift in which they had been overturned. These facts were no sooner thoroughly ascertained than the lady gave several indications of fainting, but being forewarned that, if she did, she must be carried on some gentleman's shoulders to the nearest public-house, she prudently thought better of it, and walked back with the rest.

They found, on reaching it, that it was a lonely place, with no very great accommodation in the way of apartments—that portion of its resources being all comprised in one public room with a sanded floor, and a chair or two. However, a large faggot and a plentiful supply of coals being heaped upon the fire, the appearance of things was not long in mending; and, by the time they had washed off all effaceable marks of the late accident, the room was warm and light, which was a most agreeable exchange for the cold and darkness out of doors.

"Well, Mr. Nickleby," said Squeers, insinuating himself into the warmest corner, "you did very right to catch hold of them horses. I should have done it myself if I had come to in time, but I am very glad you did it. You did it very well; very well."

"So well," said the merry-faced gentleman, who did not seem to approve very much of the patronising tone adopted by Squeers, "that if they had not been firmly checked when they were, you would most probably have had no brains left to teach with."

This remark called up a discourse relative to the promptitude Nicholas had displayed, and he was overwhelmed with compliments and commendations.

"I am very glad to have escaped, of course," observed Squeers; "every man is glad when he escapes from danger; but if any one of my charges had been hurt—if I had been prevented from restoring any one of these little boys to his parents whole and sound as I received him—what would have been my feelings? Why, the wheel atop of my head would have been far preferable to it."

"Are they all brothers, sir?" inquired the lady who had carried the "Davy" or safety lamp.

"In one sense they are, ma'am," replied Squeers, diving into his great-coat pocket for cards. "They are all under the same parental and affectionate treatment. Mrs. Squeers and myself are a mother and father to every one of 'em. Mr. Nickleby, hand the lady them cards, and offer these to the gentlemen. Perhaps they might know of some parents that would be glad to avail themselves of the establishment."

Expressing himself to this effect, Mr. Squeers, who lost no opportunity of advertising gratuitously, placed his hands upon his knees, and looked at the pupils with as much benignity as he could possibly affect, while Nicholas, blushing with shame, handed round the cards as directed.

"I hope you suffer no inconvenience from the overturn, ma'am?" said the merry-faced gentleman, addressing the fastidious lady, as though he were charitably desirous to change the subject.

"No bodily inconvenience," replied the lady.

"No mental inconvenience, I hope?"

"The subject is a very painful one to my feelings, sir," replied the lady with strong emotion: "and I beg you, as a gentleman, not to refer to it."

"Dear me," said the merry-faced gentleman, looking merrier still, "I merely intended to inquire——"

"I hope no inquiries will be made," said the lady, "or I shall be compelled to throw myself on the protection of the other gentlemen. Landlord, pray direct a boy to keep watch outside the door—and if a green chariot passes in the direction of Grantham, to stop it instantly."

The people of the house were evidently overcome by this request, and when the lady charged the boy to remember, as a means of identifying the expected green chariot, that it would have a coachman with a gold-laced hat on the box, and a footman, most probably in silk stockings, behind, the attentions of the good woman of the inn were redoubled. Even the box passenger caught the infection, and growing wonderfully deferential, immediately inquired whether there was not very good society in that neighbourhood, to which the lady replied yes, there was: in a manner which sufficiently implied that she moved at the very tiptop and summit of it all.

"As the guard has gone on horseback to Grantham to get another coach," said the good-tempered gentleman when they had been all sitting round the fire for some time in silence, "and as he must be gone a couple of hours at the very least, I propose a bowl of hot punch. What say you, sir?"

This question was addressed to the broken-headed inside, who was a man of very genteel appearance, dressed in mourning. He was not past the middle age, but his hair was grey; it seemed to have been prematurely turned by care or sorrow. He readily acceded to the proposal, and appeared to be prepossessed by the frank good-nature of the individual from whom it emanated.

This latter personage took upon himself the office of tapster when the punch was ready, and, after dispensing it all round, led the conversation to the antiquities of York, with which both he and the grey-haired gentleman appeared to be well acquainted. When this topic flagged, he turned with a smile to the grey-headed gentleman, and asked if he could sing.

"I cannot indeed," replied the gentleman, smiling in his turn.

"That's a pity," said the owner of the good-humoured countenance. "Is there nobody here who can sing a song to lighten the time?"

The passengers, one and all, protested that they could not; that they wished they could; that they couldn't remember the words of anything without the book; and so forth.

"Perhaps the lady would not object," said the president with great respect, and a merry twinkle in his eye. "Some little Italian thing out of the last opera brought out in town would be most acceptable I am sure."

As the lady condescended to make no reply, but tossed her head contemptuously, and murmured some further expression of surprise regarding the absence of the green chariot, one or two voices urged upon the president himself the propriety of making an attempt for the general benefit.

"I would if I could," said he of the good-tempered face; "for I hold that in this, as in all other cases where people who are strangers to each other are thrown unexpectedly together, they should endeavour to render themselves as pleasant, for the joint sake of the little community, as possible."

"I wish the maxim were more generally acted on in all cases," said the grey-headed gentleman.

"I'm glad to hear it," returned the other. "Perhaps, as you can't sing, you'll tell us a story?"

"Nay. I should ask you."

"After you I will, with pleasure."

"Indeed!" said the grey-haired gentleman,

smiling. "Well, let it be so. I fear the turn of my thoughts is not calculated to lighten the time you must pass here; but you have brought this upon yourselves, and shall judge. We were speaking of York Minster just now. My story shall have some reference to it. Let us call it

THE FIVE SISTERS OF YORK.

After a murmur of approbation from the other passengers, during which the fastidious lady drank a glass of punch unobserved, the grey-headed gentleman thus went on:

"A great many years ago—for the fifteenth century was scarce two years old at the time, and King Henry the Fourth sat upon the throne of England—there dwelt, in the ancient city of York, five maiden sisters, the subjects of my tale.

"These five sisters were all of surpassing beauty. The eldest was in her twenty-third year, the second a year younger, the third a year younger than the second, and the fourth a year younger than the third. They were tall stately figures, with dark flashing eyes and hair of jet; dignity and grace were in their every movement; and the fame of their great beauty had spread through all the country round.

"But, if the four elder sisters were lovely, how beautiful was the youngest, a fair creature of sixteen! The blushing tints in the soft bloom on the fruit, or the delicate painting on the flower, are not more exquisite than was the blending of the rose and lily in her gentle face, or the deep blue of her eye. The vine, in all its elegant luxuriance, is not more graceful than were the clusters of rich brown hair that sported round her brow.

"If we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be! If, while our bodies grow old and withered, our hearts could but retain their early youth and freshness, of what avail would be our sorrows and sufferings? But, the faint image of Eden which is stamped upon them in childhood chafes and rubs in our rough struggles with the world, and soon wears away: too often to leave nothing but a mournful blank remaining.

"The heart of this fair girl bounded with joy and gladness. Devoted attachment to her sisters, and a fervent love of all beautiful things in nature, were its pure affections. Her gleesome voice and merry laugh were the sweetest music of their home. She was its very light and life. The brightest flowers in the garden were reared by her; the caged birds sang when they heard her voice, and pined when they missed its sweetness. Alice, dear Alice! what living thing within the sphere of her gentle witchery could fail to love her?

"You may seek in vain, now, for the spot on which these sisters lived, for their very names have passed away, and dusty antiquaries tell of them as of a fable. But they dwelt in an old wooden house—old even in those days—with overhanging gables and balconies of rudely-carved oak, which stood within a pleasant orchard, and was surrounded by a rough stone wall, whence a stout archer might have winged an arrow to St. Mary's Abbey. The old abbey flourished then; and the five sisters, living on its fair domains, paid yearly dues to the black monks of St. Benedict, to which fraternity it belonged.

"It was a bright and sunny morning in the pleasant time of summer, when one of those black monks emerged from the abbey portal, and bent his steps towards the house of the fair sisters. Heaven above was blue, and earth beneath was green; the river glistened like a path of diamonds in the sun; the birds poured forth their songs from the shady trees; the lark soared high above the waving corn; and the deep buzz of insects filled the air. Everything looked gay and smiling; but the holy man walked gloomily on, with his eyes bent upon the ground. The beauty of the earth is but a breath, and man is but a shadow. What sympathy should a holy preacher have with either?

"With eyes bent upon the ground, then, or only raised enough to prevent his stumbling over such obstacles as lay in his way, the religious man moved slowly forward until he reached a small postern in the wall of the sisters' orchard, through which he passed, closing it behind him. The noise of soft voices in conversation, and of merry laughter, fell upon his ears ere he had advanced many paces; and, raising his eyes higher than was his humble wont, he descried, at no great distance, the five sisters seated on the grass, with Alice in the centre: all busily plying their customary task of embroidering.

"'Save you, fair daughters!' said the friar, and fair in truth they were. Even a monk might have loved them as choice masterpieces of his Maker's hand.

"The sisters saluted the holy man with becoming reverence, and the eldest motioned him to a mossy seat beside them. But the good friar shook his head, and bumped himself down on a very hard stone,—at which, no doubt, approving angels were gratified.

"'Ye were merry, daughters,' said the monk.

"'You know how light of heart sweet Alice is,' replied the eldest sister, passing her fingers through the tresses of the smiling girl.

"'And what joy and cheerfulness it wakes up within us, to see all nature beaming in brightness and sunshine, father,' added Alice, blushing beneath the stern look of the recluse.

"The monk answered not, save by a grave inclination of the head, and the sisters pursued their task in silence.

"'Still wasting the precious hours,' said the monk at length, turning to the eldest sister as he spoke, 'still wasting the precious hours on this vain trifling. Alas, alas! that the few bubbles on the surface of eternity—all that Heaven wills we should see of that dark deep stream—should be so lightly scattered!'

"'Father,' urged the maiden, pausing, as did each of the others, in her busy task, 'we have prayed at matins, our daily alms have been distributed at the gate, the sick peasants have been tended,—all our morning tasks have been performed. I hope our occupation is a blameless one?'

"'See here,' said the friar, taking the frame from her hand, 'an intricate winding of gaudy colours, without purpose or object, unless it be that one day it is destined for some vain ornament, to minister to the pride of your frail and giddy sex. Day after day has been employed upon this senseless task, and yet it is not half accomplished. The shade of each departed day falls upon our graves, and the worm exults, as he beholds it, to know that we are hastening thither. Daughters, is there no better way to pass the fleeting hours?'

"The four elder sisters cast down their eyes as if abashed by the holy man's reproof, but Alice raised hers, and bent them mildly on the friar.

"'Our dear mother,' said the maiden; 'Heaven rest her soul!'

"'Amen!' cried the friar in a deep voice.

"'Our dear mother,' faltered the fair Alice, 'was living when these long tasks began, and bade us, when she should be no more, ply them in all discretion and cheerfulness in our leisure hours; she said that if in harmless mirth and maidenly pursuits we passed those hours together, they would prove the happiest and most peaceful of our lives, and that if, in later times, we went forth into the world, and mingled with its cares and trials—if, allured by its temptations and dazzled by its glitter, we ever forgot that love and duty which should bind, in holy ties, the children of one loved parent—a glance at the old work of our common girlhood would awaken good thoughts of bygone days, and soften our hearts to affection and love.'

"'Alice speaks truly, father,' said the elder sister somewhat proudly. And, so saying, she resumed her work, as did the others.

"It was a kind of sampler of large size that each sister had before her; the device was of a complex and intricate description, and the pattern and colours of all five were the same. The sisters bent gracefully over their work; the monk, resting his chin upon his hands, looked from one to the other in silence.

"'How much better,' he said at length, 'to shun all such thoughts and chances, and, in the peaceful shelter of the church, devote your lives to Heaven! Infancy, childhood, the prime of life, and old age, wither as rapidly as they crowd upon each other. Think how human dust rolls onward to the tomb, and, turning your faces steadily towards that goal, avoid the cloud which takes its rise among the pleasures of the world, and cheats the senses of their votaries. The veil, daughters, the veil!'

"'Never, sisters,' cried Alice. 'Barter not the light and air of Heaven, and the freshness of earth and all the beautiful things which breathe upon it, for the cold cloister and the cell. Nature's own blessings are the proper goods of life, and we may share them sinlessly together. To die is our heavy portion, but, oh, let us die with life about us; when our cold hearts cease to beat, let warm hearts be beating near; let our last look be upon the bounds which God has set to his own bright skies, and not on stone walls and bars of iron! Dear sisters, let us live and die, if you list, in this green garden's compass; only shun the gloom and sadness of a cloister, and we shall be happy.'

"The tears fell fast from the maiden's eyes as she closed her impassioned appeal, and hid her face in the bosom of her sister.

"'Take comfort, Alice,' said the eldest, kissing her fair forehead. 'The veil shall never cast its shadow on thy young brow. How say you, sisters? For yourselves you speak, and not for Alice, or for me.'

"The sisters, as with one accord, cried that their lot was cast together, and that there were dwellings for peace and virtue beyond the convent's walls.

"'Father,' said the eldest lady, rising with dignity, 'you hear our final resolve. The same pious care which enriched the abbey of St. Mary, and left us, orphans, to its holy guardianship, directed that no constraint should be im-

posed upon our inclinations, but that we should be free to live according to our choice. Let us hear no more of this, we pray you. Sisters, it is nearly noon. Let us take shelter until evening!' With a reverence to the friar, the lady rose and walked towards the house, hand-in-hand with Alice; the other sisters followed.

"The holy man, who had often urged the same point before, but had never met with so direct a repulse, walked some little distance behind, with his eyes bent upon the earth, and his lips moving *as if* in prayer. As the sisters reached the porch, he quickened his pace, and called upon them to stop.

"'Stay!' said the monk, raising his right hand in the air, and directing an angry glance by turns at Alice and the eldest sister. 'Stay, and hear from me what these recollections are which you would cherish above eternity, and awaken—if in mercy they slumbered—by means of idle toys. The memory of earthly things is charged, in after life, with bitter disappointment, affliction, death; with dreary change and wasting sorrow. The time will one day come when a glance at those unmeaning baubles will tear open deep wounds in the hearts of some among you, and strike to your inmost souls. When that hour arrives—and, mark me, come it will—turn from the world to which you clung, to the refuge which you spurned. Find me the cell which shall be colder than the fire of mortals grows, when dimmed by calamity and trial, and there weep for the dreams of youth. These things are Heaven's will, not mine,' said the friar, subduing his voice, as he looked round upon the shrinking girls. 'The Virgin's blessing be upon you, daughters!'

"With these words he disappeared through the postern; and the sisters, hastening into the house, were seen no more that day.

"But nature will smile, though priests may frown, and next day the sun shone brightly, and on the next, and the next again. And in the morning's glare, and the evening's soft repose, the five sisters still walked, or worked, or beguiled the time by cheerful conversation, in their quiet orchard.

"Time passed away as a tale that is told; faster, indeed, than many tales that are told, of which number I fear this may be one. The house of the five sisters stood where it did, and the same trees cast their pleasant shade upon the orchard grass. The sisters, too, were there, and lovely as at first, but a change had come over their dwelling. Sometimes there was the clash of armour, and the gleaming of the moon on caps of steel; and, at others, jaded coursers were spurred up to the gate, and a female form glided hurriedly forth, as if eager to demand tidings of the weary messenger. A goodly train of knights and ladies lodged one night within the abbey walls, and next day rode away, with two of the fair sisters among them. Then, horsemen began to come less frequently, and seemed to bring bad tidings when they did, and at length they ceased to come at all, and footsore peasants slunk to the gate after sunset, and did their errand there by stealth. Once a vassal was dispatched in haste to the abbey at dead of night, and, when morning came, there were sounds of woe and wailing in the sisters' house; and, after this, a mournful silence fell upon it, and knight or lady, horse or armour, was seen about it no more.

"There was a sullen darkness in the sky, and the sun had gone angrily down, tinting the dull clouds with the last traces of his wrath, when the same black monk walked slowly on, with folded arms, within a stone's throw of the abbey. A blight had fallen on the trees and shrubs; and the wind, at length beginning to break the unnatural stillness that had prevailed all day, sighed heavily from time to time, as though foretelling in grief the ravages of the coming storm. The bat skimmed in fantastic flights through the heavy air, and the ground was alive with crawling things, whose instinct brought them forth to swell and fatten in the rain.

"No longer were the friar's eyes directed to the earth; they were cast abroad, and roamed from point to point, as if the gloom and desolation of the scene found a quick response in his own bosom. Again he paused near the sisters' house, and again he entered by the postern.

"But not again did his ear encounter the sound of laughter, or his eyes rest upon the beautiful figures of the five sisters. All was silent and deserted. The boughs of the trees were bent and broken, and the grass had grown long and rank. No light feet had pressed it for many, many a day.

"With the indifference or abstraction of one well accustomed to the change, the monk glided into the house, and entered a low, dark room. Four sisters sat there. Their black garments made their pale faces whiter still, and time and sorrow had worked deep ravages. They were stately yet; but the flush and pride of beauty were gone.

"And Alice—where was she? In Heaven.

"The monk—even the monk—could bear with some grief here; for it was long since these sisters had met, and there were furrows in

their blanched faces, which years could never plough. He took his seat in silence, and motioned them to continue their speech.

"'They are here, sisters,' said the elder lady in a trembling voice. 'I have never borne to look upon them since, and now I blame myself for my weakness. What is there in her memory that we should dread? To call up our old days shall be a solemn pleasure yet.'

"She glanced at the monk as she spoke, and, opening a cabinet, brought forth the five frames of work, completed long before. Her step was firm, but her hand trembled as she produced the last one; and, when the feelings of the other sisters gushed forth at sight of it, her pent-up tears made way, and she sobbed, 'God bless her!'

"The monk rose and advanced towards them. 'It was almost the last thing she touched in health,' he said in a low voice.

"'It was,' cried the elder lady, weeping bitterly.

"The monk turned to the second sister.

"'The gallant youth who looked into thine eyes, and hung upon thy very breath when first he saw thee intent upon this pastime, lies buried on a plain whereof the turf is red with blood. Rusty fragments of armour, once brightly burnished, lie rotting on the ground, and are as little distinguishable for his as are the bones that crumble in the mould!'

"The lady groaned, and wrung her hands.

"'The policy of courts,' he continued, turning to the two other sisters, 'drew ye from your peaceful home to scenes of revelry and splendour. The same policy, and the restless ambition of proud and fiery men, have sent ye back, widowed maidens, and humbled outcasts. Do I speak truly?'

"The sobs of the two sisters were their only reply.

"'There is little need,' said the monk with a meaning look, 'to fritter away the time in gewgaws which shall raise up the pale ghosts of hopes of early years. Bury them, heap penance and mortification on their heads, keep them down, and let the convent be their grave!'

The sisters asked for three days to deliberate; and felt, that night, as though the veil were indeed the fitting shroud for their dead joys. But, morning came again, and though the boughs of the orchard trees drooped and ran wild upon the ground, it was the same orchard still. The grass was coarse and high, but there was yet the spot on which they had so often sat together, when change and sorrow were but names. There was every walk and nook which Alice had made glad; and in the minster nave was one flat stone beneath which she slept in peace.

"And could they, remembering how her young heart had sickened at the thought of cloistered walls, look upon her grave in garbs which would chill the very ashes within it? Could they bow down in prayer, and, when all Heaven turned to hear them, bring the dark shade of sadness on one angel's face? No.

"They sent abroad, to artists of great celebrity in those times, and having obtained the church's sanction to their work of piety, caused to be executed, in five large compartments of richly-stained glass, a faithful copy of their old embroidery-work. These were fitted into a large window, until that time bare of ornament; and when the sun shone brightly, as she had so well loved to see it, the familiar patterns were reflected in their original colours, and throwing a stream of brilliant light upon the pavement, fell warmly on the name of Alice.

"For many hours in every day the sisters paced slowly up and down the nave, or knelt by the side of the flat broad stone. Only three were seen in the customary place after many years: then but two, and for a long time afterwards, but one solitary female bent with age. At length she came no more, and the stone bore five plain Christian names.

"That stone has worn away and been replaced by others, and many generations have come and gone since then. Time has softened down the colours, but the same stream of light still falls upon the forgotten tomb, of which no trace remains; and, to this day, the stranger is shown in York Cathedral an old window called the Five Sisters."

"That's a melancholy tale," said the merry-faced gentleman, emptying his glass.

"It is a tale of life, and life is made up of such sorrows," returned the other courteously, but in a grave and sad tone of voice.

"There are shades in all good pictures, but there are lights too, if we choose to contemplate them," said the gentleman with the merry face. "The youngest sister in your tale was always light-hearted."

"And died early," said the other gently.

"She would have died earlier, perhaps, had she been less happy," said the first speaker with much feeling. "Do you think the sisters who loved her so well would have grieved the less if her life had been one of gloom and sadness? If anything could soothe the first sharp pain of a

heavy loss, it would be—with me—the reflection that those I mourned, by being innocently happy here, and loving all about them, had prepared themselves for a purer and happier world. The sun does not shine upon this fair earth to meet frowning eyes, depend upon it."

"I believe you are right," said the gentleman who had told the story.

"Believe!" retorted the other; "can anybody doubt it? Take any subject of sorrowful regret, and see with how much pleasure it is associated. The recollection of past pleasure may become pain——"

"It does," interposed the other.

"Well; it does. To remember happiness which cannot be restored is pain, but of a softened kind. Our recollections are unfortunately mingled with much that we deplore, and with many actions which we bitterly repent; still, in the most chequered life I firmly think there are so many little rays of sunshine to look back upon, that I do not believe any mortal (unless he had put himself without the pale of hope) would deliberately drain a goblet of the waters of Lethe if he had it in his power."

"Possibly you are correct in that belief," said the grey-haired gentleman after a short reflection. "I am inclined to think you are."

"Why, then," replied the other, "the good in this state of existence preponderates over the bad, let miscalled philosophers tell us what they will. If our affections be tried, our affections are our consolation and comfort; and memory, however sad, is the best and purest link between this world and a better. But come; I'll tell you a story of another kind."

After a very brief silence, the merry-faced gentleman sent round the punch, and glancing slily at the fastidious lady, who seemed desperately apprehensive that he was going to relate something improper, began

THE BARON OF GROGZWIG.

"The Baron Von Koëldwethout, of Grogzwig in Germany, was as likely a young baron as you would wish to see. I needn't say that he lived in a castle, because that's of course; neither need I say that he lived in an old castle; for what German baron ever lived in a new one? There were many strange circumstances connected with this venerable building, among which, not the least startling and mysterious were, that when the wind blew, it rumbled in the chimneys, or even howled among the trees in the neighbouring forest; and that, when the moon shone, she found her way through certain small loopholes in the wall, and actually made some parts of the wide halls and galleries quite light, while she left others in gloomy shadow. I believe that one of the baron's ancestors, being short of money, had inserted a dagger in a gentleman who called one night to ask his way, and it *was* supposed that these miraculous occurrences took place in consequence. And yet I hardly know how that could have been, either, because the baron's ancestor, who was an amiable man, felt very sorry afterwards for having been so rash, and, laying violent hands upon a quantity of stone and timber which belonged to a weaker baron, built a chapel as an apology, and so took a receipt from Heaven in full of all demands.

"Talking of the baron's ancestor puts me in mind of the baron's great claims to respect on the score of his pedigree. I am afraid to say, I am sure, how many ancestors the baron had; but I know that he had a great many more than any other man of his time; and I only wish that he had lived in these latter days, that he might have had more. It is a very hard thing upon the great men of past centuries, that they should have come into the world so soon, because a man who was born three or four hundred years ago cannot reasonably be expected to have had as many relations before him as a man who is born now. The last man, whoever he is—and he may be a cobbler or some low vulgar dog for aught we know—will have a longer pedigree than the greatest nobleman now alive; and I contend that this is not fair.

"Well, but the Baron Von Koëldwethout of Grogzwig! He was a fine swarthy fellow, with dark hair and large moustaches, who rode a hunting in clothes of Lincoln green, with russet boots on his feet, and a bugle slung over his shoulder like the guard of a long stage. When he blew this bugle, four-and-twenty other gentlemen of inferior rank, in Lincoln green a little coarser, and russet boots with a little thicker soles, turned out directly: and away galloped the whole train, with spears in their hands like lacquered area railings, to hunt down the boars, or perhaps encounter a bear: in which latter case the baron killed him first, and greased his whiskers with him afterwards.

"This was a merry life for the Baron of Grogzwig, and a merrier still for the baron's retainers, who drank Rhine wine every night till they fell under the table, and then had the bottles on the floor, and called for pipes. Never

were such jolly, roystering, rollicking, merry-making blades as the jovial crew of Grogzwig.

"But the pleasures of the table, or the pleasures of under the table, require a little variety; especially when the same five-and-twenty people sit daily down to the same board, to discuss the same subjects, and tell the same stories. The baron grew weary, and wanted excitement. He took to quarrelling with his gentlemen, and tried kicking two or three of them every day after dinner. This was a pleasant change at first; but it became monotonous after a week or so, and the baron felt quite out of sorts, and cast about, in despair, for some new amusement.

"One night, after a day's sport in which he had outdone Nimrod or Gillingwater, and slaughtered 'another fine bear,' and brought him home in triumph, the Baron Von Koëldwethout sat moodily at the head of his table, eyeing the smoky roof of the hall with a discontented aspect. He swallowed huge bumpers of wine, but, the more he swallowed, the more he frowned. The gentlemen who had been honoured with the dangerous distinction of sitting on his right and left, imitated him to a miracle in the drinking, and frowned at each other.

"'I will!' cried the baron suddenly, smiting the table with his right hand, and twirling his moustache with his left. 'Fill to the Lady of Grogzwig!'

"The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens turned pale, with the exception of their four-and-twenty noses, which were unchangeable.

"'I said to the Lady of Grogzwig,' repeated the baron, looking round the board.

"'To the Lady of Grogzwig!' shouted the Lincoln greens; and down their four-and-twenty throats went four-and-twenty imperial pints of such rare old hock, that they smacked their eight-and-forty lips, and winked again.

"'The fair daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen,' said Koëldwethout, condescending to explain. 'We will demand her in marriage of her father ere the sun goes down to-morrow. If he refuse our suit, we will cut off his nose.'

"A hoarse murmur arose from the company; every man touched, first the hilt of his sword, and then the tip of his nose, with appalling significance.

"What a pleasant thing filial piety is to contemplate! If the daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen had pleaded a preoccupied heart, or fallen at her father's feet and corned them in salt tears, or only fainted away, and complimented the old gentleman in frantic ejaculations, the odds are a hundred to one but Swillenhausen's Castle would have been turned out at window, or rather the baron turned out at window, and the castle demolished. The damsel held her peace, however, when an early messenger bore the request of Von Koëldwethout next morning, and modestly retired to her chamber, from the casement of which she watched the coming of the suitor and his retinue. She was no sooner assured that the horseman with the large moustaches was her proffered husband than she hastened to her father's presence, and expressed her readiness to sacrifice herself to secure his peace. The venerable baron caught his child to his arms, and shed a wink of joy.

"There was great feasting at the castle that day. The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens of Von Koëldwethout exchanged vows of eternal friendship with twelve Lincoln greens of Von Swillenhausen, and promised the old baron that they would drink his wine 'Till all was blue'—meaning, probably, until their whole countenances had acquired the same tint as their noses. Everybody slapped everybody else's back when the time for parting came; and the Baron Von Koëldwethout and his followers rode gaily home.

"For six mortal weeks the bears and boars had a holiday. The houses of Koëldwethout and Swillenhausen were united; the spears rusted; and the baron's bugle grew hoarse for lack of blowing.

"Those were great times for the four-and-twenty; but, alas! their high and palmy days had taken boots to themselves, and were already walking off.

"'My dear,' said the baroness.

"'My love,' said the baron.

"'Those coarse, noisy men——'

"'Which, ma'am?' said the baron, starting.

"The baroness pointed, from the window at which they stood, to the courtyard beneath, where the unconscious Lincoln greens were taking a copious stirrup-cup preparatory to issuing forth after a boar or two.

"'My hunting train, ma'am,' said the baron.

"'Disband them, love,' murmured the baroness.

"Disband them!' cried the baron in amazement.

"'To please me, love,' replied the baroness.

"'To please the devil, ma'am,' answered the baron.

"Whereupon the baroness uttered a great cry, and swooned away at the baron's feet.

"What could the baron do? He called for the lady's maid, and roared for the doctor; and then, rushing into the yard, kicked the two Lincoln greens who were the most used to it, and cursing the others all round, bade them go—— But never mind where. I don't know the German for it, or I would put it delicately that way.

"It is not for me to say by what means, or by what degrees, some wives manage to keep down some husbands as they do, although I may have my private opinion on the subject, and may think that no Member of Parliament ought to be married, inasmuch as three married members out of every four must vote according to their wives' consciences (if there be such things), and not according to their own. All I need say, just now, is, that the Baroness Von Koëldwethout somehow or other acquired great control over the Baron Von Koëldwethout, and that, little by little, and bit by bit, and day by day, and year by year, the baron got the worst of some disputed question, or was slily unhorsed from some old hobby; and that, by the time he was a fat hearty fellow of forty-eight or thereabouts, he had no feasting, no revelry, no hunting train, and no hunting—nothing, in short, that he liked, or used to have; and that, although he was as fierce as a lion, and as bold as brass, he was decidedly snubbed and put down, by his own lady, in his own castle of Grogzwig.

"Nor was this the whole extent of the baron's misfortunes. About a year after his nuptials, there came into the world a lusty young baron, in whose honour a great many fireworks were let off, and a great many dozens of wine drunk; but next year there came a young baroness, and next year another young baron, and so on, every year, either a baron or baroness (and one year both together), until the baron found himself the father of a small family of twelve. Upon every one of these anniversaries the venerable Baroness Von Swillenhausen was nervously sensitive for the well-being of her child the Baroness Von Koëldwethout; and although it was not found that the good lady ever did anything material towards contributing to her child's recovery, still she made it a point of duty to be as nervous as possible at the castle of Grogzwig, and to divide her time between moral observations on the baron's housekeeping, and bewailing the hard lot of her unhappy daughter. And if the Baron of Grogzwig, a little hurt and irritated at this, took heart, and ventured to suggest that his wife was at least no worse off than the wives of other barons, the Baroness Von Swillenhausen begged all persons to take notice that nobody but she sympathised with her dear daughter's sufferings; upon which her relations and friends remarked that to be sure she did cry a great deal more than her son-in-law, and that, if there were a hard-hearted brute alive, it was that Baron of Grogzwig.

"The poor baron bore it all as long as he could, and, when he could bear it no longer, lost his appetite and his spirits, and sat himself gloomily and dejectedly down. But there were worse troubles yet in store for him, and, as they came on, his melancholy and sadness increased. Times changed. He got into debt. The Grogzwig coffers ran low, though the Swillenhausen family had looked upon them as inexhaustible; and, just when the baroness was on the point of making a thirteenth addition to the family pedigree, Von Koëldwethout discovered that he had no means of replenishing them.

"'I don't see what is to be done,' said the baron. 'I think I'll kill myself.'

"This was a bright idea. The baron took an old hunting knife from a cupboard hard by, and, having sharpened it on his boot, made what boys call 'an offer' at his throat.

"'Hem!' said the baron, stopping short. 'Perhaps it's not sharp enough.'

"The baron sharpened it again, and made another offer, when his hand was arrested by a loud screaming among the young barons and baronesses, who had a nursery in an up-stairs tower, with iron bars outside the window, to prevent their tumbling out into the moat.

"'If I had been a bachelor,' said the baron, sighing, 'I might have done it fifty times over without being interrupted. Hallo! Put a flask of wine and the largest pipe in the little vaulted room behind the hall.'

"One of the domestics, in a very kind manner, executed the baron's order in the course of half an hour or so, and Von Koëldwethout, being apprised thereof, strode to the vaulted room, the walls of which, being of dark shining wood, gleamed in the light of the blazing logs which were piled upon the hearth. The bottle and pipe were ready, and, upon the whole, the place looked very comfortable.

"'Leave the lamp,' said the baron.

"'Anything else, my lord?' inquired the domestic.

"'The room,' replied the baron. The domestic obeyed, and the baron locked the door.

"'I'll smoke a last pipe,' said the baron, 'and then I'll be off.' So, putting the knife upon the table till he wanted it, and tossing off a goodly measure of wine, the Lord of Grogzwig threw

himself back in his chair, stretched his legs out before the fire, and puffed away.

"He thought about a great many things—about his present troubles and past days of bachelorship, and about the Lincoln greens, long since dispersed up and down the country, no one knew whither: with the exception of two who had been unfortunately beheaded, and four who had killed themselves with drinking. His mind was running upon bears and boars, when, in the process of draining his glass to the bottom, he raised his eyes, and saw, for the first time and with unbounded astonishment, that he was not alone.

"No, he was not; for, on the opposite side of the fire, there sat with folded arms a wrinkled hideous figure, with deeply-sunk and bloodshot eyes, and an immensely long cadaverous face, shadowed by jagged and matted locks of coarse black hair. He wore a kind of tunic of a dull

"ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE FIRE, THERE SAT WITH FOLDED ARMS A WRINKLED HIDEOUS FIGURE."

bluish colour, which, the baron observed, on regarding it attentively, was clasped or ornamented down the front with coffin handles. His legs, too, were encased in coffin plates as though in armour; and over his left shoulder he wore a short dusky cloak, which seemed made of a remnant of some pall. He took no notice of the baron, but was intently eyeing the fire.

"'Halloa!' said the baron, stamping his foot to attract attention.

"'Halloa!' replied the stranger, moving his eyes towards the baron, but not his face or himself. 'What now?'

"'What now!' replied the baron, nothing daunted by his hollow voice and lustreless eyes. '*I* should ask that question. How did you get here?'

"'Through the door,' replied the figure.

"'What are you?' says the baron.

"'A man,' replied the figure.

"'I don't believe it,' says the baron.

"'Disbelieve it, then,' says the figure.

"'I will,' rejoined the baron.

"The figure looked at the bold Baron of Grogzwig for some time, and then said familiarly,

"'There's no coming over you, I see. I am not a man!'

"'What are you, then?' asked the baron.

"'A genius,' replied the figure.

"'You don't look much like one,' returned the baron scornfully.

"'I am the Genius of Despair and Suicide,' said the apparition. 'Now you know me.'

"With these words the apparition turned towards the baron, as if composing himself for a talk—and what was very remarkable was, that he threw his cloak aside, and displaying a stake, which was run through the centre of his body, pulled it out with a jerk, and laid it on the table, as composedly as if it had been a walking-stick.

"'Now,' said the figure, glancing at the hunting knife, 'are you ready for me?'

"'Not quite,' rejoined the baron; 'I must finish this pipe first.'

"'Look sharp, then,' said the figure.

"'You seem in a hurry,' said the baron.

"'Why, yes, I am,' answered the figure; 'they're doing a pretty brisk business in my way over in England and France just now, and my time is a good deal taken up.'

"'Do you drink?' said the baron, touching the bottle with the bowl of his pipe.

"'Nine times out of ten, and then very hard,' rejoined the figure drily.

"'Never in moderation?' asked the baron.

"'Never,' replied the figure with a shudder; 'that breeds cheerfulness.'

"The baron took another look at his new friend, whom he thought an uncommonly queer customer, and at length inquired whether he took any active part in such little proceedings as that which he had in contemplation.

"'No,' replied the figure evasively; 'but I am always present.'

"'Just to see fair, I suppose?' said the baron.

"'Just that,' replied the figure, playing with his stake, and examining the ferrule. 'Be as quick as you can, will you? for there's a young gentleman who is afflicted with too much money and leisure wanting me now, I find.'

"'Going to kill himself because he has too much money!' exclaimed the baron, quite tickled. 'Ha! ha! that's a good one.' (This was the first time the baron had laughed for many a long day.)

"'I say,' expostulated the figure, looking very much scared; 'don't do that again.'

"'Why not?' demanded the baron.

"'Because it gives me pain all over,' replied the figure. 'Sigh as much as you please: that does me good.'

"The baron sighed mechanically at the mention of the word; the figure, brightening up again, handed him the hunting knife with most winning politeness.

"'It's not a bad idea, though,' said the baron, feeling the edge of the weapon; 'a man killing himself because he has too much money.'

"'Pooh!' said the apparition petulantly, 'no better than a man's killing himself because he has none or little.'

"Whether the genius unintentionally committed himself in saying this, or whether he thought the baron's mind was so thoroughly made up that it didn't matter what he said, I have no means of knowing. I only know that the baron stopped his hand all of a sudden, opened his eyes wide, and looked as if quite a new light had come upon him for the first time.

"'Why, certainly,' said Von Koëldwethout, 'nothing is too bad to be retrieved.'

"'Except empty coffers,' cried the genius.

"'Well; but they may be one day filled again,' said the baron.

"'Scolding wives,' snarled the genius.

"'Oh! They may be made quiet,' said the baron.

"'Thirteen children,' shouted the genius.

"'Can't all go wrong, surely,' said the baron.

"The genius was evidently growing very savage with the baron for holding these opinions all at once; but he tried to laugh it off, and said if he would let him know when he had left off joking he should feel obliged to him.

"'But I am not joking; I was never farther from it,' remonstrated the baron.

"'Well, I am glad to hear that,' said the genius, looking very grim, 'because a joke, without any figure of speech, *is* the death of me. Come! Quit this dreary world at once.'

"'I don't know,' said the baron, playing with the knife; 'it's a dreary one certainly, but I don't think yours is much better, for you have not the appearance of being particularly comfortable. That puts me in mind—what security have I that I shall be any the better for going out of the world after all?' he cried, starting up; 'I never thought of that.'

"'Dispatch!' cried the figure, gnashing his teeth.

"'Keep off!' said the baron. 'I'll brood over miseries no longer, but put a good face on the matter, and try the fresh air and the bears again; and, if that don't do, I'll talk to the

baroness soundly, and cut the Von Swillenhausens dead.' With this the baron fell into his chair, and laughed so loud and boisterously that the room rang with it.

"The figure fell back a pace or two, regarding the baron meanwhile with a look of intense terror, and, when he had ceased, caught up the stake, plunged it violently into its body, uttered a frightful howl, and disappeared.

"Von Koëldwethout never saw it again. Having once made up his mind to action, he soon brought the baroness and the Von Swillenhausens to reason, and died many years afterwards: not a rich man that I am aware of, but certainly a happy one: leaving behind him a numerous family, who had been carefully educated in bear and boar hunting under his own personal eye. And my advice to all men is, that if ever they become hipped and melancholy from similar causes (as very many men do), they look at both sides of the question, applying a magnifying glass to the best one; and if they still feel tempted to retire without leave, that they smoke a large pipe and drink a full bottle first, and profit by the laudable example of the Baron of Grogzwig."

"The fresh coach is ready, ladies and gentlemen, if you please," said a new driver, looking in.

This intelligence caused the punch to be finished in a great hurry, and prevented any discussion relative to the last story. Mr. Squeers was observed to draw the grey-headed gentleman on one side, and to ask a question with great apparent interest; it bore reference to the Five Sisters of York, and was, in fact, an inquiry whether he could inform him how much per annum the Yorkshire convents got in those days with their boarders.

The journey was then resumed. Nicholas fell asleep towards morning, and, when he awoke, found, with great regret, that, during his nap, both the Baron of Grogzwig and the grey-haired gentleman had got down and were gone. The day dragged on uncomfortably enough. At about six o'clock that night he and Mr. Squeers, and the little boys, and their united luggage, were all put down together at the George and New Inn, Greta Bridge.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. AND MRS. SQUEERS AT HOME.

MR. SQUEERS, being safely landed, left Nicholas and the boys standing with the luggage in the road, to amuse themselves by looking at the coach as it changed horses, while he ran into the tavern and went through the leg-stretching process at the bar. After some minutes he returned, with his legs thoroughly stretched, if the hue of his nose and a short hiccup afforded any criterion; and at the same time there came out of the yard a rusty pony-chaise and a cart, driven by two labouring men.

"Put the boys and the boxes into the cart," said Squeers, rubbing his hands: "and this young man and me will go on in the chaise. Get in, Nickleby."

Nicholas obeyed. Mr. Squeers with some difficulty inducing the pony to obey also, they started off, leaving the cart-load of infant misery to follow at leisure.

"Are you cold, Nickleby?" inquired Squeers after they had travelled some distance in silence.

"Rather, sir, I must say."

"Well, I don't find fault with that," said Squeers; "it's a long journey this weather."

"Is it much farther to Dotheboys Hall, sir?" asked Nicholas.

"About three mile from here," replied Squeers. "But you needn't call it a Hall down here."

Nicholas coughed, as if he would like to know why.

"The fact is, it ain't a Hall," observed Squeers drily.

"Oh, indeed!" said Nicholas, whom this piece of intelligence much astonished.

"No," replied Squeers. "We call it a Hall up in London, because it sounds better, but they don't know it by that name in these parts. A man may call his house an island if he likes; there's no Act of Parliament against that, I believe?"

"I believe not, sir," rejoined Nicholas.

Squeers eyed his companion slily at the conclusion of this little dialogue, and finding that he had grown thoughtful, and appeared in nowise disposed to volunteer any observations, contented himself with lashing the pony until they reached their journey's end.

"Jump out," said Squeers. "Hallo there! come and put this horse up. Be quick, will you?"

While the schoolmaster was uttering these and other impatient cries, Nicholas had time to observe that the school was a long, cold-looking house, one story high, with a few straggling outbuildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining. After the lapse of a minute or two, the noise of somebody unlocking the yard-gate was heard, and presently a tall, lean boy with a lantern in his hand, issued forth.

"Is that you, Smike?" cried Squeers.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy.

"Then why the devil didn't you come before?"

"Please, sir, I fell asleep over the fire," answered Smike with humility.

"Fire! what fire? Where's there a fire?" demanded the schoolmaster sharply.

"Only in the kitchen, sir," replied the boy. "Missus said, as I was sitting up, I might go in there for a warm."

"Your missus is a fool," retorted Squeers. "You'd have been a deuced deal more wakeful in the cold, I'll engage."

By this time Mr. Squeers had dismounted; and after ordering the boy to see to the pony, and to take care that he hadn't any more corn that night, he told Nicholas to wait at the front-door a minute while he went round and let him in.

A host of unpleasant misgivings, which had been crowding upon Nicholas during the whole journey, thronged into his mind with redoubled force when he was left alone. His great distance from home, and the impossibility of reaching it, except on foot, should he feel ever so anxious to return, presented itself to him in most alarming colours; and as he looked up at the dreary house and dark windows, and upon the wild country round covered with snow, he felt a depression of heart and spirit which he had never experienced before.

"Now then!" cried Squeers, poking his head out at the front-door. "Where are you, Nickleby?"

"Here, sir," replied Nicholas.

"Come in, then," said Squeers; "the wind blows in at this door fit to knock a man off his legs."

Nicholas sighed, and hurried in. Mr. Squeers, having bolted the door to keep it shut, ushered him into a small parlour scantily furnished with a few chairs, a yellow map hung against the wall, and a couple of tables; one of which bore some preparations for supper; while, on the other, a tutor's assistant, a Murray's grammar, half-a-dozen cards of terms, and a worn letter directed to Wackford Squeers, Esquire, were arranged in picturesque confusion.

They had not been in this apartment a couple of minutes, when a female bounced into the room, and, seizing Mr. Squeers by the throat, gave him two loud kisses: one close after the other, like a postman's knock. The lady, who was of a large raw-boned figure, was about half a head taller than Mr. Squeers, and was dressed in a dimity night-jacket; with her hair in papers; she had also a dirty nightcap on, relieved by a yellow cotton handkerchief which tied it under the chin.

"How is my Squeery?" said this lady in a playful manner, and a very hoarse voice.

"Quite well, my love," replied Squeers. "How's the cows?"

"All right, every one of 'em," answered the lady.

"And the pigs?" said Squeers.

"As well as they were when you went away."

"Come; that's a blessing," said Squeers, pulling off his great-coat. "The boys are all as they were, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, they're well enough!" replied Mrs. Squeers snappishly. "That young Pitcher's had a fever."

"No!" exclaimed Squeers. "Damn that boy, he's always at something of that sort!"

"Never was such a boy, I do believe," said Mrs. Squeers; "whatever he has is always catching, too. I say it's obstinacy, and nothing shall ever convince me that it isn't. I'd beat it out of him; and I told you that six months ago."

"So you did, my love," rejoined Squeers. "We'll try what can be done."

Pending these little endearments, Nicholas had stood, awkwardly enough, in the middle of the room: not very well knowing whether he was expected to retire into the passage, or to remain where he was. He was now relieved from his perplexity by Mr. Squeers.

"This is the new young man, my dear," said that gentleman.

"Oh!" replied Mrs. Squeers, nodding her head at Nicholas, and eyeing him coldly from top to toe.

"He'll take a meal with us to-night," said Squeers, "and go among the boys to-morrow morning. You can give him a shake-down here to-night, can't you?"

"We must manage it somehow," replied the lady. "You don't much mind how you sleep, I suppose, sir?"

"No, indeed," replied Nicholas, "I am not particular."

"That's lucky," said Mrs. Squeers. And, as the lady's humour was considered to lie chiefly in retort, Mr. Squeers laughed heartily, and

seemed to expect that Nicholas should do the same.

After some further conversation between the master and mistress relative to the success of Mr. Squeers's trip and the people who had paid, and the people who had made default in payment, a young servant-girl brought in a Yorkshire pie and some cold beef, which being set upon the table, the boy Smike appeared with a jug of ale.

Mr. Squeers was emptying his great-coat pockets of letters to different boys, and other small documents, which he had brought down in them. The boy glanced, with an anxious and timid expression, at the papers, as if with a sickly hope that one among them might relate to him. The look was a very painful one, and went to Nicholas's heart at once; for it told a long and very sad history.

It induced him to consider the boy more attentively, and he was surprised to observe the extraordinary mixture of garments which formed his dress. Although he could not have been less than eighteen or nineteen years old, and was tall for that age, he wore a skeleton suit, such as is usually put upon very little boys, and which, though most absurdly short in the arms and legs, was quite wide enough for his attenuated frame. In order that the lower part of his legs might be in perfect keeping with this singular dress, he had a very large pair of boots, originally made for tops, which might have been once worn by some stout farmer, but were now too patched and tattered for a beggar. Heaven knows how long he had been there, but he still wore the same linen which he had first taken down; for, round his neck, was a tattered child's frill, only half concealed by a coarse, man's neckerchief. He was lame; and, as he feigned to be busy in arranging the table, glanced at the letters with a look so keen, and yet so dispirited and hopeless, that Nicholas could hardly bear to watch him.

"What are you bothering about there, Smike?" cried Mrs. Squeers. "Let the things alone, can't you?"

"Eh?" said Squeers, looking up. "Oh! it's you, is it?"

"Yes, sir," replied the youth, pressing his hands together, as though to control, by force, the nervous wandering of his fingers. "Is there——"

"Well!" said Squeers.

"Have you—did anybody—has nothing been heard—about me?"

"Devil a bit," replied Squeers testily.

The lad withdrew his eyes, and, putting his hand to his face, moved towards the door.

"Not a word," resumed Squeers, "and never will be. Now, this is a pretty sort of thing, isn't it, that you should have been left here all these years, and no money paid after the first six—nor no notice taken, nor no clue to be got who you belong to? It's a pretty sort of thing that I should have to feed a great fellow like you, and never hope to get one penny for it, isn't it?"

The boy put his hand to his head as if he were making an effort to recollect something, and then, looking vacantly at his questioner, gradually broke into a smile, and limped away.

"I'll tell you what, Squeers," remarked his wife as the door closed, "I think that young chap's turning silly."

"I hope not," said the schoolmaster; "for he's a handy fellow out of doors, and worth his meat and drink, anyway. I should think he'd have wit enough for us, though, if he was. But come; let's have supper, for I am hungry and tired, and want to get to bed."

This reminder brought in an exclusive steak for Mr. Squeers, who speedily proceeded to do it ample justice. Nicholas drew up his chair, but his appetite was effectually taken away.

"How's the steak, Squeers?" said Mrs. S.

"Tender as a lamb," replied Squeers. "Have a bit?"

"I couldn't eat a morsel," replied his wife. "What'll the young man take, my dear?"

"Whatever he likes that's present," rejoined Squeers in a most unusual burst of generosity.

"What do you say, Mr. Knuckleboy?" inquired Mrs. Squeers.

"I'll take a little of the pie, if you please," replied Nicholas. "A very little, for I'm not hungry."

"Well, it's a pity to cut the pie if you're not hungry, isn't it?" said Mrs. Squeers. "Will you try a bit of the beef?"

"Whatever you please," replied Nicholas abstractedly; "it's all the same to me."

Mrs. Squeers looked vastly gracious on receiving this reply; and nodding to Squeers, as much as to say that she was glad to find the young man knew his station, assisted Nicholas to a slice of meat with her own fair hands.

"Ale, Squeery?" inquired the lady, winking and frowning to give him to understand that the question propounded was, whether Nicholas should have ale, and not whether he (Squeers) would take any.

"Certainly," said Squeers, re-telegraphing in the same manner. "A glassful."

So Nicholas had a glassful, and, being occupied with his own reflections, drank it, in happy innocence of all the foregone proceedings.

"Uncommon juicy steak that," said Squeers as he laid down his knife and fork, after plying it, in silence, for some time.

"It's prime meat," rejoined his lady. "I bought a good large piece of it myself on purpose for——"

"For what?" exclaimed Squeers hastily. "Not for the——"

"No, no; not for them," rejoined Mrs. Squeers; "on purpose for you against you came home. Lor! you didn't think I could have made such a mistake as that?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I didn't know what you were going to say," said Squeers, who had turned pale.

"You needn't make yourself uncomfortable," remarked his wife, laughing heartily. "To think that I should be such a noddy! Well!"

This part of the conversation was rather unintelligible; but popular rumour in the neighbourhood asserted that Mr. Squeers, being amiably opposed to cruelty to animals, not unfrequently purchased for boy consumption the bodies of horned cattle who had died a natural death; possibly he was apprehensive of having unintentionally devoured some choice morsel intended for the young gentlemen.

Supper being over, and removed by a small servant-girl with a hungry eye, Mrs. Squeers retired to lock it up, and also to take into safe custody the clothes of the five boys who had just arrived, and who were half-way up the troublesome flight of steps which leads to death's door, in consequence of exposure to the cold. They were then regaled with a light supper of porridge, and stowed away, side by side, in a small bedstead, to warm each other, and dream of a substantial meal with something hot after it, if their fancies set that way: which it is not at all improbable they did.

Mr. Squeers treated himself to a stiff tumbler of brandy-and-water, made on the liberal half-and-half principle, allowing for the dissolution of the sugar; and his amiable helpmate mixed Nicholas the ghost of a small glassful of the same compound. This done, Mr. and Mrs. Squeers drew close up to the fire, and, sitting with their feet on the fender, talked confidentially in whispers; while Nicholas, taking up the tutor's assistant, read the interesting legends in the miscellaneous questions, and all the figures into the bargain, with as much thought or consciousness of what he was doing as if he had been in a magnetic slumber.

At length Mr. Squeers yawned fearfully, and opined that it was high time to go to bed; upon which signal Mrs. Squeers and the girl dragged in a small straw mattress and a couple of blankets, and arranged them into a couch for Nicholas.

"We'll put you into your regular bedroom to-morrow, Nickleby," said Squeers. "Let me see! Who sleeps in Brooks's bed, my dear?"

"In Brooks's?" said Mrs. Squeers, pondering. "There's Jennings, little Bolder, Graymarsh, and what's-his-name."

"So there is," rejoined Squeers. "Yes! Brooks is full."

"Full!" thought Nicholas. "I should think he was."

"There's a place somewhere, I know," said Squeers; "but I can't at this moment call to mind where it is. However, we'll have that all settled to-morrow. Good night, Nickleby. Seven o'clock in the morning, mind."

"I shall be ready, sir," replied Nicholas. "Good night."

"I'll come in myself and show you where the well is," said Squeers. "You'll always find a little bit of soap in the kitchen window; that belongs to you."

Nicholas opened his eyes, but not his mouth; and Squeers was again going away, when he once more turned back.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he said, "whose towel to put you on; but, if you'll make shift with something to-morrow morning, Mrs. Squeers will arrange that in the course of the day. My dear, don't forget."

"I'll take care," replied Mrs. Squeers; "and mind *you* take care, young man, and get first wash. The teacher ought always to have it; but they get the better of him if they can."

Mr. Squeers then nudged Mrs. Squeers to bring away the brandy-bottle, lest Nicholas should help himself in the night; and the lady having seized it with great precipitation, they retired together.

Nicholas, being left alone, took half-a-dozen turns up and down the room in a condition of much agitation and excitement; but, growing gradually calmer, sat himself down in a chair, and mentally resolved that, come what come might, he would endeavour, for a time, to bear whatever wretchedness might be in store for him, and that, remembering the helplessness of his mother and sister, he would give his uncle no plea for deserting them in their need. Good resolutions seldom fail of producing some good effect in the mind from which they spring. He grew less desponding, and—so sanguine and

buoyant is youth—even hoped that affairs at Dotheboys Hall might yet prove better than they promised.

He was preparing for bed, with something like renewed cheerfulness, when a sealed letter fell from his coat pocket. In the hurry of leaving London, it had escaped his attention, and had not occurred to him since, but it at once brought back to him the recollection of the mysterious behaviour of Newman Noggs.

"Dear me!" said Nicholas; "what an extraordinary hand!"

It was directed to himself, was written upon very dirty paper, and in such cramped and crippled writing as to be almost illegible. After great difficulty and much puzzling, he contrived to read as follows:—

"My dear young Man,

"I know the world. Your father did not, or he would not have done me a kindness when there was no hope of return. You do not, or you would not be bound on such a journey.

"If ever you want a shelter in London (don't be angry at this, *I* once thought I never should), they know where I live at the sign of the Crown, in Silver Street, Golden Square. It is at the corner of Silver Street and James Street, with a bar door both ways. You can come at night. Once, nobody was ashamed—never mind that. It's all over.

"Excuse errors. I should forget how to wear a whole coat now. I have forgotten all my old ways. My spelling may have gone with them.

"Newman Noggs.

"P.S.—If you should go near Barnard Castle, there is good ale at the King's Head. Say you know me, and I am sure they will not charge you for it. You may say Mr. Noggs there, for I was a gentleman then. I was indeed."

It may be a very undignified circumstance to record, but, after he had folded this letter and placed it in his pocket-book, Nicholas Nickleby's eyes were dimmed with a moisture that might have been taken for tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE INTERNAL ECONOMY OF DOTHEBOYS HALL.

A RIDE of two hundred and odd miles in severe weather is one of the best softeners of a hard bed that ingenuity can devise. Perhaps it is even a sweetener of dreams, for those which hovered over the rough couch of Nicholas, and whispered their airy nothings in his ear, were of an agreeable and happy kind. He was making his fortune very fast indeed, when the faint glimmer of an expiring candle shone before his eyes, and a voice he had no difficulty in recognising as part and parcel of Mr. Squeers admonished him that it was time to rise.

"Past seven, Nickleby," said Mr. Squeers.

"Has morning come already?" asked Nicholas, sitting up in bed.

"Ah! that has it," replied Squeers, "and ready iced too. Now, Nickleby, come; tumble up, will you?"

Nicholas needed no further admonition, but "tumbled up" at once, and proceeded to dress himself by the light of the taper which Mr. Squeers carried in his hand.

"Here's a pretty go," said that gentleman; "the pump's froze."

"Indeed!" said Nicholas, not much interested in the intelligence.

"Yes," replied Squeers. "You can't wash yourself this morning."

"Not wash myself!" exclaimed Nicholas.

"No, not a bit of it," rejoined Squeers tartly. "So you must be content with giving yourself a dry polish till we break the ice in the well, and can get a bucketful out for the boys. Don't stand staring at me, but do look sharp, will you?"

Offering no further observation, Nicholas huddled on his clothes. Squeers, meanwhile, opened the shutters and blew the candle out; when the voice of his amiable consort was heard in the passage, demanding admittance.

"Come in, my love," said Squeers.

Mrs. Squeers came in, still habited in the primitive night-jacket which had displayed the symmetry of her figure on the previous night, and further ornamented with a beaver bonnet of some antiquity, which she wore, with much ease and lightness, on the top of the nightcap before mentioned.

"Drat the things!" said the lady, opening the cupboard; "I can't find the school spoon anywhere."

"Never mind it, my dear," observed Squeers in a soothing manner; "it's of no consequence."

"No consequence! Why, how you talk!" retorted Mrs. Squeers sharply; "isn't it brimstone morning?"

"I forgot, my dear," rejoined Squeers; "yes, it certainly is. We purify the boys' bloods now and then, Nickleby."

"Purify fiddlesticks' ends," said his lady. "Don't think, young man, that we go to the expense of flower of brimstone and molasses, just to purify them; because, if you think we carry on the business in that way, you'll find yourself mistaken, and so I tell you plainly."

"My dear!" said Squeers, frowning. "Hem!"

"Oh! nonsense," rejoined Mrs. Squeers. "If the young man comes to be a teacher here, let him understand, at once, that we don't want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone-and-treacle, partly because, if they hadn't something or other in the way of medicine, they'd be always ailing and giving a world of trouble, and partly because it spoils their appetites, and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So, it does them good and us good at the same time, and that's fair enough I'm sure."

Having given this explanation, Mrs. Squeers put her head into the closet, and instituted a stricter search after the spoon, in which Mr. Squeers assisted. A few words passed between them while they were thus engaged, but, as their voices were partially stifled by the cupboard, all that Nicholas could distinguish was, that Mr. Squeers said what Mrs. Squeers had said was injudicious, and that Mrs. Squeers said what Mr. Squeers said was "stuff."

A vast deal of searching and rummaging ensued, and it proving fruitless, Smike was called in, and pushed by Mrs. Squeers, and boxed by Mr. Squeers; which course of treatment brightening his intellects, enabled him to suggest that possibly Mrs. Squeers might have the spoon in her pocket, as, indeed, turned out to be the case. As Mrs. Squeers had previously protested, however, that she was quite certain she had not got it, Smike received another box on the ear for presuming to contradict his mistress, together with a promise of a sound thrashing if he were not more respectful in future; so that he took nothing very advantageous by his motion.

"A most invaluable woman, that, Nickleby," said Squeers when his consort had hurried away, pushing the drudge before her.

"Indeed, sir!" observed Nicholas.

"I don't know her equal," said Squeers; "I do not know her equal. That woman, Nickleby, is always the same—always the same bustling, lively, active, saving creetur that you see her now."

Nicholas sighed involuntarily at the thought of the agreeable domestic prospect thus opened to him; but Squeers was, fortunately, too much occupied with his own reflections to perceive it.

"It's my way to say, when I am up in London," continued Squeers, "that to them boys she is a mother. But she is more than a mother to them; ten times more. She does things for them boys, Nickleby, that I don't believe half the mothers going would do for their own sons."

"I should think they would not, sir," answered Nicholas.

Now, the fact was, that both Mr. and Mrs. Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they were both agreed, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only difference between them was, that Mrs. Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow.

"But come," said Squeers, interrupting the progress of some thoughts to this effect in the mind of his usher, "let's go to the schoolroom; and lend me a hand with my school coat, will you?"

Nicholas assisted his master to put on an old fustian shooting jacket, which he took down from a peg in the passage; and Squeers, arming himself with his cane, led the way across a yard, to a door in the rear of the house.

"There," said the schoolmaster as they stepped in together; "this is our shop, Nickleby!"

It was such a crowded scene, and there were so many objects to attract attention, that, at first, Nicholas stared about him, really without seeing anything at all. By degrees, however, the place resolved itself into a bare and dirty room, with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copy-books and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked, and damaged in every possible way; two or three forms; a detached desk for Squeers; and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported, like that of a barn, by crossbeams and rafters; and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash.

But the pupils—the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures,

children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a gaol; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved

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down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!

And yet this scene, painful as it was, had its grotesque features, which, in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile. Mrs. Squeers stood at one of the desks, presiding over an immense basin of brimstone-and-treacle, of which delicious compound she administered a large instalment to each boy in succession: using for the purpose a common wooden spoon, which might have been originally manufactured for some gigantic top, and which widened every young gentleman's mouth considerably: they being all obliged, under heavy corporal penalties, to take in the whole of the bowl at a gasp. In another corner, huddled together for companionship, were the little boys who had arrived on the preceding night, three of them in very large leather breeches, and two in old trousers, a something tighter fit than drawers are usually worn; at no great distance from these was seated the juvenile son and heir of Mr. Squeers—a striking likeness of his father—kicking, with great vigour, under the hands of

Smike, who was fitting upon him a pair of new boots that bore a most suspicious resemblance to those which the least of the little boys had worn on the journey down—as the little boy himself seemed to think, for he was regarding the appropriation with a look of most rueful amazement. Besides these, there was a long row of boys waiting, with countenances of no pleasant anticipation, to be treacled; and another file, who had just escaped from the infliction, making a variety of wry mouths indicative of anything but satisfaction. The whole were attired in such motley, ill-assorted, extraordinary garments as would have been irresistibly ridiculous, but for the foul appearance of dirt, disorder, and disease with which they were associated.

"Now," said Squeers, giving the desk a great rap with his cane, which made half the little boys nearly jump out of their boots, "is that physicking over?"

"Just over," said Mrs. Squeers, choking the last boy in her hurry, and tapping the crown of his head with the wooden spoon to restore him. "Here, you Smike; take away now. Look sharp!"

Smike shuffled out with the basin, and Mrs. Squeers having called up a little boy with a curly head, and wiped her hands upon it, hurried out after him into a species of wash-house, where there was a small fire and a large kettle, together with a number of little wooden bowls which were arranged upon a board.

Into these bowls, Mrs. Squeers, assisted by the hungry servant, poured a brown composition, which looked like diluted pin-cushions without the covers, and was called porridge. A minute wedge of brown bread was inserted in each bowl, and, when they had eaten their porridge by means of the bread, the boys ate the bread itself, and had finished their breakfast; whereupon Mr. Squeers said, in a solemn voice, "For what we have received may the Lord make us truly thankful!"—and went away to his own.

Nicholas distended his stomach with a bowl of porridge, for much the same reason which induces some savages to swallow earth—lest they should be inconveniently hungry when there is nothing to eat. Having further disposed of a slice of bread and-butter, allotted to him in virtue of his office, he sat himself down to wait for school-time.

He could not but observe how silent and sad the boys all seemed to be. There was none of the noise and clamour of a schoolroom; none of its boisterous play, or hearty mirth. The children sat crouching and shivering together, and seemed to lack the spirit to move about. The only pupil who evinced the slightest tendency towards locomotion or playfulness was Master Squeers, and, as his chief amusement was to tread upon the other boys' toes in his new boots, his flow of spirits was rather disagreeable than otherwise.

After some half-hour's delay Mr. Squeers reappeared, and the boys took their places and their books, of which latter commodity the average might be about one to eight learners. A few minutes having elapsed, during which Mr. Squeers looked very profound, as if he had a perfect apprehension of what was inside all the books, and could say every word of their contents by heart if he only chose to take the trouble, that gentleman called up the first class.

Obedient to this summons, there ranged themselves in front of the schoolmaster's desk half-a-dozen scarecrows, out at knees and elbows, one of whom placed a torn and filthy book beneath his learned eye.

"This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby," said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. "We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?"

"Please, sir, he's cleaning the back-parlour window," said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

"So he is, to be sure," rejoined Squeers. "We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where's the second boy?"

"Please, sir, he's weeding the garden," replied a small voice.

"To be sure," said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. "So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system, Nickleby: what do you think of it?"

"It's a very useful one, at any rate," answered Nicholas.

"I believe you," rejoined Squeers, not remarking the emphasis of his usher. "Third boy, what's a horse?"

"A beast, sir," replied the boy.

"So it is," said Squeers. "Ain't it, Nickleby?"

"I believe there is no doubt of that, sir," answered Nicholas.

"Of course there isn't," said Squeers. "A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?"

"Where, indeed?" said Nicholas abstractedly.

"As you're perfect in that," resumed Squeers, turning to the boy, "go and look after *my* horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water up till somebody tells you to leave off, for it's washing-day to-morrow, and they want the coppers filled."

So saying, he dismissed the first class to their experiments in practical philosophy, and eyed Nicholas with a look, half cunning and half doubtful, as if he were not altogether certain what he might think of him by this time.

"That's the way we do it, Nickleby," he said after a pause.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders in a manner that was scarcely perceptible, and said he saw it was.

"And a very good way it is, too," said Squeers. "Now, just take them fourteen little boys, and hear them some reading, because, you know, you must begin to be useful. Idling about here won't do."

Mr. Squeers said this as if it had suddenly occurred to him, either that he must not say too much to his assistant, or that his assistant did not say enough to him in praise of the establishment. The children were arranged in a semicircle round the new master, and he was soon listening to their dull, drawling, hesitating recital of those stories of engrossing interest which are to be found in the more antiquated spelling-books.

In this exciting occupation the morning lagged heavily on. At one o'clock, the boys, having previously had their appetites thoroughly taken away by stir-about and potatoes, sat down in the kitchen to some hard salt beef, of which Nicholas was graciously permitted to take his portion to his own solitary desk, to eat it there in peace. After this there was another hour of crouching in the schoolroom and shivering with cold, and then school began again.

It was Mr. Squeers's custom to call the boys together, and make a sort of report, after every half-yearly visit to the metropolis, regarding the relations and friends he had seen, the news he had heard, the letters he had brought down, the bills which had been paid, the accounts which had been left unpaid, and so forth. This solemn proceeding always took place in the afternoon of the day succeeding his return; perhaps because the boys acquired strength of mind from the suspense of the morning, or, possibly, because Mr. Squeers himself acquired greater sternness and inflexibility from certain warm potations in which he was wont to indulge after his early dinner. Be this as it may, the boys were recalled from house window, garden, stable, and cow-yard, and the school were assembled in full conclave, when Mr. Squeers, with a small bundle of papers in his hand, and Mrs. S. following with a pair of canes, entered the room and proclaimed silence.

"Let any boy speak a word without leave," said Mr. Squeers mildly, "and I'll take the skin off his back."

This special proclamation had the desired effect, and a death-like silence immediately prevailed, in the midst of which Mr. Squeers went on to say:

"Boys, I've been to London, and have returned to my family and you, as strong and well as ever."

According to half-yearly custom, the boys gave three feeble cheers at this refreshing intelligence. Such cheers! Sighs of extra strength with the chill on.

"I have seen the parents of some boys," continued Squeers, turning over his papers, "and they're so glad to hear how their sons are getting on, that there's no prospect at all of their going away, which of course is a very pleasant thing to reflect upon for all parties."

Two or three hands went to two or three eyes when Squeers said this, but the greater part of the young gentlemen, having no particular parents to speak of, were wholly uninterested in the thing one way or other.

"I have had disappointments to contend against," said Squeers, looking very grim; "Bolder's father was two pound ten short. Where is Bolder?"

"Here he is, please, sir," rejoined twenty officious voices. Boys are very like men to be sure.

"Come here, Bolder," said Squeers.

An unhealthy-looking boy, with warts all over his hands, stepped from his place to the master's desk, and raised his eyes imploringly to Squeers's face; his own, quite white from the rapid beating of his heart.

"Bolder!" said Squeers, speaking very slowly, for he was considering, as the saying goes, where to have him. "Bolder, if your father thinks that because—— Why, what's this, sir?"

As Squeers spoke, he caught up the boy's hand by the cuff of his jacket, and surveyed it with an edifying aspect of horror and disgust.

"What do you call this, sir?" demanded the schoolmaster, administering a cut with the cane to expedite the reply.

"I can't help it, indeed, sir," rejoined the boy, crying. "They will come; it's the dirty work I think, sir—at least, I don't know what it is, sir, but it's not my fault."

"Bolder," said Squeers, tucking up his wristbands, and moistening the palm of his right hand to get a good grip of the cane, "you're an incorrigible young scoundrel, and, as the last thrashing did you no good, we must see what another will do towards beating it out of you."

With this, and wholly disregarding a piteous cry for mercy, Mr. Squeers fell upon the boy, and caned him soundly: not leaving off, indeed, until his arm was tired out.

"There," said Squeers when he had quite done; "rub away as hard as you like, you won't rub that off in a hurry. Oh! you won't hold that noise, won't you? Put him out, Smike."

The drudge knew better, from long experience, than to hesitate about obeying, so he bundled the victim out by a side-door, and Mr. Squeers perched himself again on his own stool, supported by Mrs. Squeers, who occupied another at his side.

"Now let us see," said Squeers. "A letter for Cobbey. Stand up, Cobbey."

Another boy stood up, and eyed the letter very hard while Squeers made a mental abstract of the same.

"Oh!" said Squeers: "Cobbey's grandmother is dead, and his uncle John has took to drinking, which is all the news his sister sends, except eighteen-pence, which will just pay for that broken square of glass. Mrs. Squeers, my dear, will you take the money?"

The worthy lady pocketed the eighteen-pence with a most business-like air, and Squeers passed on to the next boy as coolly as possible.

"Graymarsh," said Squeers, "he's the next. Stand up, Graymarsh."

Another boy stood up, and the schoolmaster looked over the letter as before.

"Graymarsh's maternal aunt," said Squeers when he had possessed himself of the contents, "is very glad to hear he's so well and happy, and sends her respectful compliments to Mrs. Squeers, and thinks she must be an angel. She likewise thinks Mr. Squeers is too good for this world; but hopes he may long be spared to carry on the business. Would have sent the two pair of stockings as desired, but is short of money, so forwards a tract instead, and hopes Graymarsh will put his trust in Providence. Hopes, above all, that he will study in everything to please Mr. and Mrs. Squeers, and look upon them as his only friends; and that he will love Master Squeers; and not object to sleeping five in a bed, which no Christian should. Ah!" said Squeers, folding it up, "a delightful letter. Very affecting indeed."

It was affecting in one sense, for Graymarsh's maternal aunt was strongly supposed, by her more intimate friends, to be no other than his maternal parent. Squeers, however, without alluding to this part of the story (which would have sounded immoral before boys), proceeded with the business by calling out "Mobbs," whereupon another boy rose, and Graymarsh resumed his seat.

"Mobbs's mother-in-law," said Squeers, "took to her bed on hearing that he wouldn't eat fat, and has been very ill ever since. She wishes to know, by an early post, where he expects to go to if he quarrels with his vittles; and with what feelings he could turn up his nose at the cow's-liver broth, after his good master had asked a blessing on it. This was told her in the London newspapers—not by Mr. Squeers, for he is too kind and too good to set anybody against anybody—and it has vexed her so much, Mobbs can't think. She is sorry to find he is discontented, which is sinful and horrid, and hopes Mr. Squeers will flog him into a happier state of mind; with which view she has also stopped his halfpenny a week pocket money, and given a double-bladed knife with a cork-screw in it to the Missionaries, which she had bought on purpose for him."

"A sulky state of feeling," said Squeers after a terrible pause, during which he had moistened the palm of his right hand again, "won't do. Cheerfulness and contentment must be kept up. Mobbs, come to me!"

Mobbs moved slowly towards the desk, rubbing his eyes in anticipation of good cause for doing so; and he soon afterwards retired by the side-door, with as good cause as a boy need have.

Mr. Squeers then proceeded to open a miscellaneous collection of letters; some enclosing money, which Mrs. Squeers "took care of;" and others referring to small articles of apparel, as caps and so forth, all of which the same lady stated to be too large, or too small, and calculated for nobody but young Squeers, who would appear, indeed, to have had most accommodating limbs, since everything that came into the

school fitted him to a nicety. His head, in particular, must have been singularly elastic, for hats and caps of all dimensions were alike to him.

This business dispatched, a few slovenly lessons were performed, and Squeers retired to his fireside, leaving Nicholas to take care of the boys in the schoolroom, which was very cold, and where a meal of bread and cheese was served out shortly after dark.

There was a small stove at that corner of the room which was nearest to the master's desk, and by it Nicholas sat down, so depressed and self-degraded by the consciousness of his position, that, if death could have come upon him at that time, he would have been almost happy to meet it. The cruelty of which he had been an unwilling witness, the coarse and ruffianly behaviour of Squeers even in his best moods, the filthy place, the sights and sounds about him,

"PAIN AND FEAR, PAIN AND FEAR FOR ME, ALIVE OR DEAD. NO HOPE, NO HOPE!"

all contributed to this state of feeling; but when he recollected that, being there as an assistant, he actually seemed—no matter what unhappy train of circumstances had brought him to that pass—to be the aider and abettor of a system which filled him with honest disgust and indignation, he loathed himself, and felt, for the moment, as though the mere consciousness of his present situation must, through all time to come, prevent his raising his head again.

But, for the present, his resolve was taken, and the resolution he had formed on the preceding night remained undisturbed. He had written to his mother and sister, announcing the safe conclusion of his journey, and saying as little about Dotheboys Hall, and saying that little as cheerfully, as he possibly could. He hoped that, by remaining where he was, he might do some good, even there; at all events, others depended too much on his uncle's favour to admit of his awakening his wrath just then.

One reflection disturbed him far more than

any selfish considerations arising out of his own position. This was the probable destination of his sister Kate. His uncle had deceived him, and might he not consign her to some miserable place where her youth and beauty would prove a far greater curse than ugliness and decrepitude? To a caged man, bound hand and foot, this was a terrible idea;—but no, he thought, his mother was by; there was the portrait painter, too—simple enough, but still living in the world, and of it. He was willing to believe that Ralph Nickleby had conceived a personal dislike to himself. Having pretty good reason, by this time, to reciprocate it, he had no great difficulty in arriving at this conclusion, and tried to persuade himself that the feeling extended no farther than between them.

As he was absorbed in these meditations, he all at once encountered the upturned face of Smike, who was on his knees before the stove, picking a few stray cinders from the hearth, and planting them on the fire. He had paused to steal a look at Nicholas, and, when he saw that he was observed, shrunk back, as if expecting a blow.

"You need not fear me," said Nicholas kindly. "Are you cold?"

"N-n-o."

"You are shivering."

"I am not cold," replied Smike quickly. "I am used to it."

There was such an obvious fear of giving offence in his manner, and he was such a timid, broken-spirited creature, that Nicholas could not help exclaiming, "Poor fellow!"

If he had struck the drudge, he would have slunk away without a word. But, now, he burst into tears.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" he cried, covering his face with his cracked and horny hands. "My heart will break. It will, it will!"

"Hush!" said Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "Be a man; you are nearly one by years, God help you."

"By years!" cried Smike. "Oh dear, dear, how many of them! How many of them since I was a little child, younger than any that are here now! Where are they all?"

"Whom do you speak of?" inquired Nicholas, wishing to rouse the poor half-witted creature to reason. "Tell me."

"My friends," he replied, "myself—my—oh! what sufferings mine have been!"

"There is always hope," said Nicholas; he knew not what to say.

"No," rejoined the other, "no; none for me. Do you remember the boy that died here?"

"I was not here, you know," said Nicholas gently; "but what of him?"

"Why," replied the youth, drawing closer to his questioner's side, "I was with him at night, and when it was all silent he cried no more for friends he wished to come and sit with him, but began to see faces round his bed that came from home; he said they smiled, and talked to him; and he died at last lifting his head to kiss them. Do you hear?"

"Yes, yes," rejoined Nicholas.

"What faces will smile on me when I die?" cried his companion, shivering. "Who will talk to me in those long nights? They cannot come from home; they would frighten me if they did, for I don't know what it is, and shouldn't know them. Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope!"

The bell rang to bed: and the boy, subsiding at the sound into his usual listless state, crept away as if anxious to avoid notice. It was with a heavy heart that Nicholas soon afterwards—no, not retired; there was no retirement there—followed—to his dirty and crowded dormitory.

CHAPTER IX.

OF MISS SQUEERS, MRS. SQUEERS, MASTER SQUEERS, AND MR. SQUEERS; AND OF VARIOUS MATTERS AND PERSONS CONNECTED NO LESS WITH THE SQUEERSES THAN WITH NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.

WHEN Mr. Squeers left the school-room for the night, he betook himself, as has been before remarked, to his own fireside, which was situated—not in the room in which Nicholas had supped on the night of his arrival, but in a smaller apartment in the rear of the premises, where his lady wife, his amiable son, and accomplished daughter were in the full enjoyment of each other's society; Mrs. Squeers being engaged in the matronly pursuit of stocking-darning; and the young lady and gentleman being occupied in the adjustment of some youthful differences by means of a pugilistic contest across the table, which, on the approach of their honoured parent, subsided into a noiseless exchange of kicks beneath it.

And, in this place, it may be as well to apprise the reader that Miss Fanny Squeers was in her three-and-twentieth year. If there be any one grace or loveliness inseparable from that particular period of life, Miss Squeers may be presumed to have been possessed of it, as there

is no reason to suppose that she was a solitary exception to an universal rule. She was not tall like her mother, but short like her father; from the former she inherited a voice of harsh quality; from the latter a remarkable expression of the right eye, something akin to having none at all.

Miss Squeers had been spending a few days with a neighbouring friend, and had only just returned to the parental roof. To this circumstance may be referred her having heard nothing of Nicholas until Mr. Squeers himself now made him the subject of conversation.

"Well, my dear," said Squeers, drawing up his chair, "what do you think of him by this time?"

"Think of who?" inquired Mrs. Squeers; who (as she often remarked) was no grammarian, thank Heaven.

"Of the young man—the new teacher—who else could I mean?"

"Oh! that Knuckleboy," said Mrs. Squeers impatiently. "I hate him."

"What do you hate him for, my dear?" asked Squeers.

"What's that to you?" retorted Mrs. Squeers. "If I hate him, that's enough, ain't it?"

"Quite enough for him, my dear, and a great deal too much, I dare say, if he knew it," replied Squeers in a pacific tone. "I only ask from curiosity, my dear."

"Well, then, if you want to know," rejoined Mrs. Squeers, "I'll tell you. Because he is a proud, haughty, consequential, turned-up-nosed peacock."

Mrs. Squeers, when excited, was accustomed to use strong language, and, moreover, to make use of a plurality of epithets, some of which were of a figurative kind, as the word peacock, and furthermore the allusion to Nicholas's nose, which was not intended to be taken in its literal sense, but rather to bear a latitude of construction according to the fancy of the hearers.

Neither were they meant to bear reference to each other, so much as to the object on whom they were bestowed, as will be seen in the present case: a peacock with a turned-up nose being a novelty in ornithology, and a thing not commonly seen.

"Hem!" said Squeers, as if in mild deprecation of this outbreak. "He is cheap, my dear; the young man is very cheap."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Mrs. Squeers.

"Five pound a year," said Squeers.

"What of that? It's dear if you don't want him, isn't it?" replied his wife.

"But we *do* want him," urged Squeers.

"I don't see that you want him any more than the dead," said Mrs. Squeers. "Don't tell me. You can put on the cards and in the advertisements, 'Education by Mr. Wackford Squeers and able assistants,' without having any assistants, can't you? Isn't it done every day by all the masters about? I've no patience with you."

"Haven't you?" said Squeers sternly. "Now, I'll tell you what, Mrs. Squeers. In this matter of having a teacher I'll take my own way, if you please. A slave-driver in the West Indies is allowed a man under him, to see that his blacks don't run away, or get up a rebellion; and I'll have a man under me to do the same with *our* blacks, till such time as little Wackford is able to take charge of the school."

"Am I to take care of the school when I grow up a man, father?" said Wackford junior, suspending, in the excess of his delight, a vicious kick which he was administering to his sister.

"You are, my son," replied Mr. Squeers in a sentimental voice.

"Oh, my eye, won't I give it to the boys!" exclaimed the interesting child, grasping his father's cane. "Oh, father, won't I make 'em squeak again!"

It was a proud moment in Mr. Squeers's life when he witnessed that burst of enthusiasm in his young child's mind, and saw in it a foreshadowing of his future eminence. He pressed a penny into his hand, and gave vent to his feelings (as did his exemplary wife also) in a shout of approving laughter. The infantine appeal to their common sympathies at once restored cheerfulness to the conversation, and harmony to the company.

"He's a nasty stuck-up monkey, that's what I consider him," said Mrs. Squeers, reverting to Nicholas.

"Supposing he is," said Squeers, "he is as well stuck up in our schoolroom as anywhere else, isn't he?—especially as he don't like it."

"Well," observed Mrs. Squeers, "there's something in that. I hope it'll bring his pride down, and it shall be no fault of mine if it don't."

Now, a proud usher in a Yorkshire school was such a very extraordinary and unaccountable thing to hear of—any usher at all being a novelty; but a proud one, a being of whose existence the wildest imagination could never have dreamed—that Miss Squeers, who seldom troubled herself with scholastic matters, inquired with much curiosity who this Knuckleboy was, that gave himself such airs.

"Nickleby," said Squeers, spelling the name

according to some eccentric system which prevailed in his own mind; "your mother always calls things and people by their wrong names."

"No matter for that," said Mrs. Squeers; "I see them with right eyes, and that's quite enough for me. I watched him when you were laying on to little Bolder this afternoon. He looked as black as thunder all the while, and, one time, started up as if he had more than got it in his mind to make a rush at you. *I* saw him, though he thought I didn't."

"Never mind that, father," said Miss Squeers, as the head of the family was about to reply. "Who is the man?"

"Why, your father has got some nonsense in his head that he's the son of a poor gentleman that died the other day," said Mrs. Squeers.

"The son of a gentleman!"

"Yes; but I don't believe a word of it. If he's a gentleman's son at all, he's a fondling, that's my opinion."

Mrs. Squeers intended to say "foundling," but, as she frequently remarked when she made any such mistake, it would be all the same a hundred years hence; with which axiom of philosophy, indeed, she was in the constant habit of consoling the boys when they laboured under more than ordinary ill-usage.

"He's nothing of the kind," said Squeers in answer to the above remark, "for his father was married to his mother years before he was born, and she is alive now. If he was, it would be no business of ours, for we make a very good friend by having him here; and, if he likes to learn the boys anything besides minding them, I have no objection I am sure."

"I say again, I hate him worse than poison," said Mrs. Squeers vehemently.

"If you dislike him, my dear," returned Squeers, "I don't know anybody who can show dislike better than you, and of course there's no occasion, with him, to take the trouble to hide it."

"I don't intend to, I assure you," interposed Mrs. S.

"That's right," said Squeers; "and if he has a touch of pride about him, as I think he has, I don't believe there's a woman in all England that can bring anybody's spirit down as quick as you can, my love."

Mrs. Squeers chuckled vastly on the receipt of these flattering compliments, and said she hoped she had tamed a high spirit or two in her day. It is but due to her character to say that, in conjunction with her estimable husband, she had broken many and many a one.

Miss Fanny Squeers carefully treasured up this, and much more conversation on the same subject, until she retired for the night, when she questioned the hungry servant minutely regarding the outward appearance and demeanour of Nicholas; to which queries the girl returned such enthusiastic replies, coupled with so many laudatory remarks touching his beautiful dark eyes, and his sweet smile, and his straight legs—upon which last-named articles she laid particular stress; the general run of legs at Dotheboys Hall being crooked—that Miss Squeers was not long in arriving at the conclusion that the new usher must be a very remarkable person, or, as she herself significantly phrased it, "something quite out of the common." And so Miss Squeers made up her mind that she would take a personal observation of Nicholas the very next day.

In pursuance of this design, the young lady watched the opportunity of her mother being engaged, and her father absent, and went accidentally into the schoolroom to get a pen mended: where, seeing nobody but Nicholas presiding over the boys, she blushed very deeply, and exhibited great confusion.

"I beg your pardon," faltered Miss Squeers; "I thought my father was—or might be—dear me, how very awkward!"

"Mr. Squeers is out," said Nicholas, by no means overcome by the apparition, unexpected though it was.

"Do you know will he be long, sir?" asked Miss Squeers with bashful hesitation.

"He said about an hour," replied Nicholas—politely of course, but without any indication of being stricken to the heart by Miss Squeers's charms.

"I never knew anything happen so cross," exclaimed the young lady. "Thank you! I am very sorry I intruded, I am sure. If I hadn't thought my father was here, I wouldn't upon any account have—it is very provoking—must look so very strange," murmured Miss Squeers, blushing once more, and glancing, from the pen in her hand, to Nicholas at his desk, and back again.

"If that is all you want," said Nicholas, pointing to the pen, and smiling, in spite of himself, at the affected embarrassment of the schoolmaster's daughter, "perhaps I can supply his place."

Miss Squeers glanced at the door, as if dubious of the propriety of advancing any nearer to an utter stranger; then round the schoolroom, as though in some measure reassured by the presence of forty boys; and finally sidled up to Nicholas, and delivered the pen into his hand,

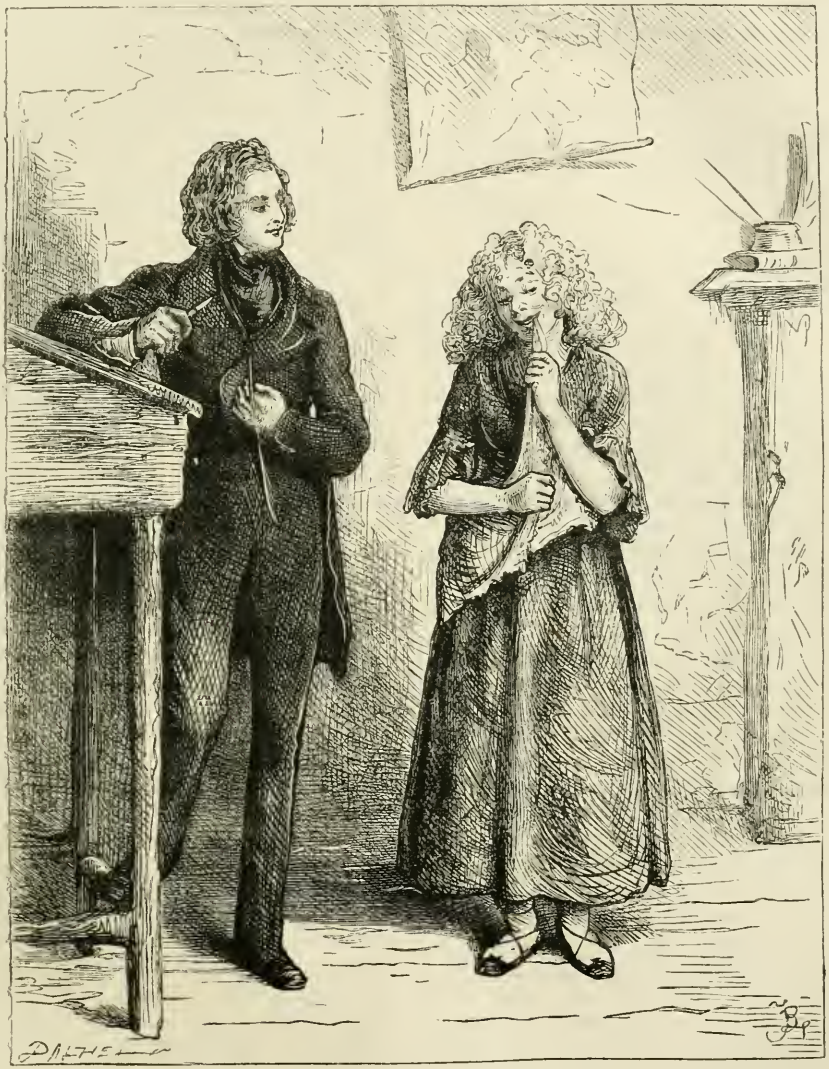
with a most winning mixture of reserve and condescension.

"Shall it be a hard or a soft nib?" inquired Nicholas, smiling, to prevent himself from laughing outright.

"He *has* a beautiful smile," thought Miss Squeers.

"Which did you say?" asked Nicholas.

"Dear me, I was thinking of something else for the moment, I declare," replied Miss Squeers.



"OH! AS SOFT AS POSSIBLE, IF YOU PLEASE."

"Oh! as soft as possible, if you please." With which words Miss Squeers sighed. It might be to give Nicholas to understand that her heart was soft, and that the pen was wanted to match.

Upon these instructions Nicholas made the pen. When he gave it to Miss Squeers, Miss Squeers dropped it; and, when he stooped to pick it up, Miss Squeers stooped also, and they knocked their heads together; whereat five-and-twenty little boys laughed aloud: being positively for the first and only time that half-year.

"Very awkward of me," said Nicholas, opening the door for the young lady's retreat.

"Not at all, sir," replied Miss Squeers; "it was

my fault. It was all my foolish—a—a—good morning!"

"Good-bye," said Nicholas. "The next I make for you, I hope will be made less clumsily. Take care! You are biting the nib off now."

"Really," said Miss Squeers; "so embarrassing that I scarcely know what I—very sorry to give you so much trouble."

"Not the least trouble in the world," replied Nicholas, closing the schoolroom door.

"I never saw such legs in the whole course of my life!" said Miss Squeers as she walked away.

In fact, Miss Squeers was in love with Nicholas Nickleby.

To account for the rapidity with which this young lady had conceived a passion for Nicholas, it may be necessary to state that the friend from whom she had so recently returned was a miller's daughter of only eighteen, who had contracted herself unto the son of a small corn-factor, resident in the nearest market-town. Miss Squeers and the miller's daughter, being fast friends, had covenanted together some two years before, according to a custom prevalent among young ladies, that whoever was first engaged to be married should straightway confide the mighty secret to the bosom of the other, before communicating it to any living soul, and bespeak her as bridesmaid without loss of time; in fulfilment of which pledge the miller's daughter, when her engagement was formed, came out express, at eleven o'clock at night as the corn-factor's son made an offer of his hand and heart at twenty-five minutes past ten by the Dutch clock in the kitchen, and rushed into Miss Squeers's bedroom with the gratifying intelligence. Now, Miss Squeers, being five years older, and out of her teens (which is also a great matter), had since been more than commonly anxious to return the compliment, and possess her friend with a similar secret; but, either in consequence of finding it hard to please herself, or harder still to please anybody else, had never had an opportunity so to do, inasmuch as she had no such secret to disclose. The little interview with Nicholas had no sooner passed, as above described, however, than Miss Squeers, putting on her bonnet, made her way, with great precipitation, to her friend's house, and, upon a solemn renewal of divers old vows of secrecy, revealed how that she was—not exactly engaged, but going to be—to a gentleman's son—(none of your corn-factors, but a gentleman's son of high descent)—who had come down as teacher to Dotheboys Hall, under most mysterious and remarkable circumstances—indeed, as Miss Squeers more than once hinted she had good reason to believe, induced, by the fame of her many charms, to seek her out, and woo and win her.

"Isn't it an extraordinary thing?" said Miss Squeers, emphasizing the adjective strongly.

"Most extraordinary," replied the friend. "But what has he said to you?"

"Don't ask me what he said, my dear," rejoined Miss Squeers. "If you had only seen his looks and smiles! I never was so overcome in all my life."

"Did he look in this way?" inquired the miller's daughter, counterfeiting, as nearly as she could, a favourite leer of the corn-factor.

"Very like that—only more genteel," replied Miss Squeers.

"Ah!" said the friend, "then he means something, depend on it."

Miss Squeers, having slight misgivings on the subject, was by no means ill pleased to be confirmed by a competent authority; and discovering, on further conversation and comparison of notes, a great many points of resemblance between the behaviour of Nicholas and that of the corn-factor, grew so exceedingly confidential, that she intrusted her friend with a vast number of things Nicholas had *not* said, which were all so very complimentary as to be quite conclusive. Then, she dilated on the fearful hardship of having a father and mother strenuously opposed to her intended husband; on which unhappy circumstance she dwelt at great length; for the friend's father and mother were quite agreeable to her being married, and the whole courtship was in consequence as flat and commonplace an affair as it was possible to imagine.

"How I should like to see him!" exclaimed the friend.

"So you shall, 'Tilda," replied Miss Squeers. "I should consider myself one of the most ungrateful creatures alive, if I denied you. I think mother's going away for two days to fetch some boys; and, when she does, I'll ask you and John up to tea, and have him to meet you."

This was a charming idea, and, having fully discussed it, the friends parted.

It so fell out that Mrs. Squeers's journey to some distance to fetch three new boys, and dun the relations of two old ones for the balance of a small account, was fixed, that very afternoon, for the next day but one; and, on the next day but one, Mrs. Squeers got up outside the coach, as it stopped to change at Greta Bridge, taking with her a small bundle containing something in a bottle, and some sandwiches, and carrying,

besides, a large white top-coat to wear in the night-time; with which baggage she went her way.

Whenever such opportunities as these occurred, it was Squeers's custom to drive over to the market-town every evening, on pretence of urgent business, and stop till ten or eleven o'clock at a tavern he much affected. As the party was not in his way, therefore, but rather afforded a means of compromise with Miss Squeers, he readily yielded his full assent thereunto, and willingly communicated to Nicholas that he was expected to take his tea in the parlour that evening at five o'clock.

To be sure Miss Squeers was in a desperate flutter as the time approached, and to be sure she was dressed out to the best advantage: with her hair—it had more than a tinge of red, and she wore it in a crop—curled in five distinct rows, up to the very top of her head, and arranged dexterously over the doubtful eye; to say nothing of the blue sash which floated down her back, or the worked apron, or the long gloves, or the green gauze scarf, worn over one shoulder and under the other; or any of the numerous devices which were to be as so many arrows to the heart of Nicholas. She had scarcely completed these arrangements to her entire satisfaction, when the friend arrived with a whity-brown parcel—flat and three-cornered—containing sundry small adornments which were to be put on up-stairs, and which the friend put on, talking incessantly. When Miss Squeers had "done" the friend's hair, the friend "did" Miss Squeers's hair, throwing in some striking improvements in the way of ringlets down the neck; and then, when they were both touched up to their entire satisfaction, they went down-stairs in full state, with the long gloves on, all ready for company.

"Where's John, 'Tilda?" said Miss Squeers.

"Only gone home to clean himself," replied the friend. "He will be here by the time the tea's drawn."

"I do so palpitate," observed Miss Squeers.

"Ah! I know what it is," replied the friend.

"I have not been used to it, you know, 'Tilda," said Miss Squeers, applying her hand to the left side of her sash.

"You'll soon get the better of it, dear," rejoined the friend. While they were talking thus, the hungry servant brought in the tea-things, and, soon afterwards, somebody tapped at the room-door.

"There he is!" cried Miss Squeers. "Oh, 'Tilda!"

"Hush!" said 'Tilda. "Hem! Say, come in."

"Come in," cried Miss Squeers faintly. And in walked Nicholas.

"Good evening," said that young gentleman, all unconscious of his conquest. "I understood from Mr. Squeers that——"

"Oh yes; it's all right!" interposed Miss Squeers. "Father don't tea with us, but you won't mind that, I dare say." (This was said archly.)

Nicholas opened his eyes at this, but he turned the matter off very coolly—not caring, particularly, about anything just then—and went through the ceremony of introduction to the miller's daughter with so much grace, that that young lady was lost in admiration.

"We are only waiting for one more gentleman," said Miss Squeers, taking off the teapot lid, and looking in, to see how the tea was getting on.

It was matter of equal moment to Nicholas whether they were waiting for one gentleman or twenty, so he received the intelligence with perfect unconcern; and, being out of spirits, and not seeing any especial reason why he should make himself agreeable, looked out of the window and sighed involuntarily.

As luck would have it, Miss Squeers's friend was of a playful turn, and hearing Nicholas sigh, she took it into her head to rally the lovers on their lowness of spirits.

"But if it's caused by my being here," said the young lady, "don't mind me a bit, for I'm quite as bad. You may go on just as you would if you were alone."

"'Tilda," said Miss Squeers, colouring up to the top row of curls, "I am ashamed of you;" and here the two friends burst into a variety of giggles, and glanced from time to time, over the tops of their pocket-handkerchiefs, at Nicholas, who, from a state of unmixed astonishment, gradually fell into one of irrepressible laughter—occasioned partly by the bare notion of his being in love with Miss Squeers, and partly by the preposterous appearance and behaviour of the two girls. These two causes of merriment, taken together, struck him as being so keenly ridiculous, that, despite his miserable condition, he laughed till he was thoroughly exhausted.

"Well," thought Nicholas, "as I am here, and seem expected, for some reason or other, to be amiable, it's of no use looking like a goose. I may as well accommodate myself to the company."

We blush to tell it: but his youthful spirits and vivacity getting, for the time, the better of his sad thoughts, he no sooner formed this resolution than he saluted Miss Squeers and the

friend with great gallantry, and, drawing a chair to the tea-table, began to make himself more at home than in all probability an usher has ever done in his employer's house since ushers were first invented.

The ladies were in the full delight of this altered behaviour on the part of Mr. Nickleby, when the expected swain arrived, with his hair very damp from recent washing, and a clean shirt, whereof the collar might have belonged to some giant ancestor, forming, together with a white waistcoat of similar dimensions, the chief ornament of his person.

"Well, John," said Miss Matilda Price (which, by-the-bye, was the name of the miller's daughter).

"Weel," said John with a grin that even the collar could not conceal.

"I beg your pardon," interposed Miss Squeers, hastening to do the honours. "Mr. Nickleby —Mr. John Browdie."

"Servant, sir," said John, who was something over six feet high, with a face and body rather above the due proportion than below it.

"Yours to command, sir," replied Nicholas, making fearful ravages on the bread-and-butter.

Mr. Browdie was not a gentleman of great conversational powers, so he grinned twice more, and, having now bestowed his customary mark of recognition on every person in company, grinned at nothing particular, and helped himself to food.

"Old wooman awa', bean't she?" said Mr. Browdie with his mouth full.

Miss Squeers nodded assent.

Mr. Browdie gave a grin of special width, as if he thought that really was something to laugh at, and went to work at the bread-and-butter with increased vigour. It was quite a sight to behold how he and Nicholas emptied the plate between them.

"Ye wean't get bread-and-butther ev'ry neight, I expect, mun," said Mr. Browdie after he had sat staring at Nicholas a long time over the empty plate.

Nicholas bit his lip, and coloured, but affected not to hear the remark.

"Ecod," said Mr. Browdie, laughing boisterously, "they dean't put too much intiv'em. Ye'll be nowt but skeen and boans if you stop here long eneaf. Ho! ho! ho!"

"You are facetious, sir," said Nicholas scornfully.

"Na; I dean't know," replied Mr. Browdie, "but t'oother teacher, 'cod he wur a learn 'un, he wur." The recollection of the last teacher's leanness seemed to afford Mr. Browdie the most exquisite delight, for he laughed until he found it necessary to apply his coat-cuffs to his eyes.

"I don't know whether your perceptions are quite keen enough, Mr. Browdie, to enable you to understand that your remarks are offensive," said Nicholas in a towering passion, "but if they are, have the goodness to——"

"If you say another word, John," shrieked Miss Price, stopping her admirer's mouth as he was about to interrupt, "only half a word, I'll never forgive you, or speak to you again."

"Weel, my lass, I dean't care aboot 'un," said the corn-factor, bestowing a hearty kiss on Miss Matilda; "let 'un gang on, let 'un gang on."

It now became Miss Squeers's turn to intercede with Nicholas, which she did with many symptoms of alarm and horror. The effect of the double intercession was, that he and John Browdie shook hands across the table with much gravity; and such was the imposing nature of the ceremonial, that Miss Squeers was overcome, and shed tears.

"What's the matter, Fanny?" said Miss Price.

"Nothing, 'Tilda," replied Miss Squeers, sobbing.

"There never was any danger," said Miss Price, "was there, Mr. Nickleby?"

"None at all," replied Nicholas. "Absurd."

"That's right," whispered Miss Price; "say something kind to her, and she'll soon come round. Here! Shall John and I go into the little kitchen, and come back presently?"

"Not on any account," rejoined Nicholas, quite alarmed at the proposition. "What on earth should you do that for?"

"Well," said Miss Price, beckoning him aside, and speaking with some degree of contempt— "you *are* a one to keep company."

"What do you mean?" said Nicholas. "I am not a one to keep company at all—here at all events. I can't make this out."

"No, nor I neither," rejoined Miss Price; "but men are always fickle, and always were, and always will be; that I can make out very easily."

"Fickle!" cried Nicholas; "what do you suppose? You don't mean to say that you think——"

"Oh no, I think nothing at all!" retorted Miss Price pettishly. "Look at her, dressed so beautiful, and looking so well—really *almost* handsome. I am ashamed at you."

"My dear girl, what have I got to do with her dressing beautifully or looking well?" inquired Nicholas.

"Come, don't call me a dear girl," said Miss Price,—smiling a little, though, for she was

pretty, and a coquette too in her small way, and Nicholas was good-looking, and she supposed him the property of somebody else, which were all reasons why she should be gratified to think she had made an impression on him,—"or Fanny will be saying it's my fault. Come; we're going to have a game at cards." Pronouncing these last words aloud, she tripped away and rejoined the big Yorkshireman.

This was wholly unintelligible to Nicholas, who had no other distinct impression on his mind at the moment than that Miss Squeers was an ordinary-looking girl, and her friend Miss Price a pretty one; but he had not time to enlighten himself by reflection, for the hearth being by this time swept up, and the candle snuffed, they sat down to play speculation.

"There are only four of us, 'Tilda," said Miss Squeers, looking slily at Nicholas; "so we had better go partners, two against two."

"What do you say, Mr. Nickleby?" inquired Miss Price.

"With all the pleasure in life," replied Nicholas. And so saying, quite unconscious of his heinous offence, he amalgamated into one common heap those portions of a Dotheboys Hall card of terms which represented his own counters, and those allotted to Miss Price, respectively.

"Mr. Browdie," said Miss Squeers hysterically, "shall we make a bank against them?"

The Yorkshireman assented — apparently quite overwhelmed by the new usher's impudence—and Miss Squeers darted a spiteful look at her friend, and giggled convulsively.

The deal fell to Nicholas, and the hand prospered.

"We intend to win everything," said he.

"'Tilda *has* won something she didn't expect, I think, haven't you, dear?" said Miss Squeers maliciously.

"Only a dozen and eight, love," replied Miss Price, affecting to take the question in a literal sense.

"How dull you are to-night!" sneered Miss Squeers.

"No, indeed," replied Miss Price, "I am in excellent spirits. I was thinking *you* seemed out of sorts."

"Me!" cried Miss Squeers, biting her lips, and trembling with very jealousy. "Oh no!"

"That's well," remarked Miss Price. "Your hair's coming out of curl, dear."

"Never mind me," tittered Miss Squeers; "you had better attend to your partner."

"Thank you for reminding her," said Nicholas. "So she had."

The Yorkshireman flattened his nose, once or twice, with his clenched fist, as if to keep his hand in till he had an opportunity of exercising it upon the features of some other gentleman; and Miss Squeers tossed her head with such indignation, that the gust of wind raised by the multitudinous curls in motion nearly blew the candle out.

"I never had such luck, really," exclaimed coquettish Miss Price after another hand or two. "It's all along of you, Mr. Nickleby, I think. I should like to have you for a partner always."

"I wish you had."

"You'll have a bad wife, though, if you always win at cards," said Miss Price.

"Not if your wish is gratified," replied Nicholas. "I am sure I shall have a good one in that case."

To see how Miss Squeers tossed her head, and the corn-factor flattened his nose, while this conversation was carrying on! It would have been worth a small annuity to have beheld that; let alone Miss Price's evident joy at making them jealous, and Nicholas Nickleby's happy unconsciousness of making anybody uncomfortable.

"We have all the talking to ourselves, it seems," said Nicholas, looking good-humouredly round the table as he took up the cards for a fresh deal.

"You do it so well," tittered Miss Squeers, "that it would be a pity to interrupt, wouldn't it, Mr. Browdie? He! he! he!"

"Nay," said Nicholas, "we do it in default of having anybody else to talk to."

"We'll talk to you, you know, if you'll say anything," said Miss Price.

"Thank you, 'Tilda dear," retorted Miss Squeers majestically.

"Or you can talk to each other, if you don't choose to talk to us," said Miss Price, rallying her dear friend. "John, why don't you say something?"

"Say summat?" repeated the Yorkshireman.

"Ay, and not sit there so silent and glum."

"Weel, then!" said the Yorkshireman, striking the table heavily with his fist, "what I say's this—Dang my boans and boddy if I stan' this ony longer! Do ye gang whoam wi' me, and do yon loight an' toight young whipster look sharp out for a brokken head next time he cums under my hond."

"Mercy on us, what's all this?" cried Miss Price in affected astonishment.

"Cum whoam, tell 'ee, cum whoam," replied

the Yorkshireman sternly. And, as he delivered the reply, Miss Squeers burst into a shower of tears; arising in part from desperate vexation, and in part from an impotent desire to lacerate somebody's countenance with her fair finger-nails.

This state of things had been brought about by divers means and workings. Miss Squeers had brought it about by aspiring to the high state and condition of being matrimonially engaged, without good grounds for so doing; Miss Price had brought it about by indulging in three motives of action: first, a desire to punish her friend for laying claim to a rivalship in dignity, having no good title: secondly, the gratification of her own vanity, in receiving the compliments of a smart young man: and thirdly, a wish to convince the corn-factor of the great danger he ran in deferring the celebration of their expected nuptials; while Nicholas had brought it about by half an hour's gaiety and thoughtlessness, and a very sincere desire to avoid the imputation of inclining at all to Miss Squeers. So the means employed, and the end produced, were alike the most natural in the world; for young ladies will look forward to being married, and will jostle each other in the race to the altar, and will avail themselves of all opportunities of displaying their own attractions to the best advantage, down to the very end of time, as they have done from its beginning.

"Why, and here's Fanny in tears now!" exclaimed Miss Price, as if in fresh amazement. "What can be the matter?"

"Oh! you don't know, miss, of course you don't know. Pray don't trouble yourself to inquire," said Miss Squeers, producing that change of countenance which children call making a face.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Miss Price.

"And who cares whether you are sure or not, ma'am?" retorted Miss Squeers, making another face.

"You are monstrous polite, ma'am," said Miss Price.

"I shall not come to you to take lessons in the art, ma'am!" retorted Miss Squeers.

"You needn't take the trouble to make yourself plainer than you are, ma'am, however," rejoined Miss Price, "because that's quite unnecessary."

Miss Squeers, in reply, turned very red, and thanked God that she hadn't got the bold faces of some people. Miss Price, in rejoinder, congratulated herself upon not being possessed of the envious feeling of other people; whereupon Miss Squeers made some general remark touching the danger of associating with low persons; in which Miss Price entirely coincided: observing that it was very true indeed, and she had thought so a long time.

"'Tilda," exclaimed Miss Squeers with dignity, "I hate you!"

"Ah! There's no love lost between us, I assure you," said Miss Price, tying her bonnet strings with a jerk. "You'll cry your eyes out when I'm gone; you know you will."

"I scorn your words, Minx," said Miss Squeers.

"You pay me a great compliment when you say so," answered the miller's daughter, curtsying very low. "Wish you a very good night, ma'am, and pleasant dreams attend your sleep!"

With this parting benediction, Miss Price swept from the room, followed by the huge Yorkshireman, who exchanged with Nicholas, at parting, that peculiarly expressive scowl with which the cut-and-thrust counts, in melodramatic performances, inform each other they will meet again.

They were no sooner gone than Miss Squeers fulfilled the prediction of her quondam friend by giving vent to a most copious burst of tears, and uttering various dismal lamentations and incoherent words. Nicholas stood looking on for a few seconds, rather doubtful what to do, but feeling uncertain whether the fit would end in his being embraced, or scratched, and considering that either infliction would be equally agreeable, he walked off very quietly while Miss Squeers was moaning in her pocket-handkerchief.

"This is one consequence," thought Nicholas when he had groped his way to the dark sleeping-room, "of my cursed readiness to adapt myself to any society in which chance carries me. If I had sat mute and motionless, as I might have done, this would not have happened."

He listened for a few minutes, but all was quiet.

"I was glad," he murmured, "to grasp at any relief from the sight of this dreadful place, or the presence of its vile master. I have set these people by the ears, and made two new enemies, where, Heaven knows, I needed none. Well, it is a just punishment for having forgotten, even for an hour, what is around me now!"

So saying, he felt his way among the throng of weary-hearted sleepers, and crept into his poor bed.

CHAPTER X.

HOW MR. RALPH NICKLEBY PROVIDED FOR HIS NIECE AND SISTER-IN-LAW.

ON the second morning after the departure of Nicholas for Yorkshire, Kate Nickleby sat in a very faded chair raised upon a very dusty throne in Miss La Creevy's room, giving that lady a sitting for the portrait upon which she was engaged; and towards the full perfection of which Miss La Creevy had had the street-door case brought up-stairs, in order that she might be the better able to infuse into the counterfeit countenance of Miss Nickleby a bright salmon flesh-tint which she had originally hit upon while executing the miniature of a young officer therein contained, and which bright salmon flesh-tint was considered, by Miss La Creevy's chief friends and patrons, to be quite a novelty in art: as indeed it was.

"I think I have caught it now," said Miss La Creevy. "The very shade! This will be the sweetest portrait I have ever done, certainly."

"It will be your genius that makes it so, then, I am sure," replied Kate, smiling.

"No, no, I won't allow that, my dear," rejoined Miss La Creevy. "It's a very nice subject—a very nice subject indeed—though, of course, something depends upon the mode of treatment."

"And not a little," observed Kate.

"Why, my dear, you are right there," said Miss La Creevy, "in the main you are right there; though I don't allow that it is of such very great importance in the present case. Ah! The difficulties of Art, my dear, are great."

"They must be, I have no doubt," said Kate, humouring her good-natured little friend.

"They are beyond anything you can form the faintest conception of," replied Miss La Creevy. "What with bringing out eyes with all one's power, and keeping down noses with all one's force, and adding to heads, and taking away teeth altogether, you have no idea of the trouble one little miniature is."

"The remuneration can scarcely repay you," said Kate.

"Why, it does not, and that's the truth," answered Miss La Creevy; "and then people are so dissatisfied and unreasonable, that, nine times out of ten, there's no pleasure in painting them. Sometimes they say, 'Oh, how very serious you have made me look, Miss La Creevy!' and at others, 'La, Miss La Creevy, how very smirking!' when the very essence of a good portrait is, that it must be either serious or smirking, or it's no portrait at all."

"Indeed!" said Kate, laughing.

"Certainly, my dear; because the sitters are always either the one or the other," replied Miss La Creevy. "Look at the Royal Academy! All those beautiful shiny portraits of gentlemen in black velvet waistcoats, with their fists doubled up on round tables, or marble slabs, are serious, you know; and all the ladies who are playing with little parasols, or little dogs, or little children—it's the same rule in art, only varying the objects—are smirking. In fact," said Miss La Creevy, sinking her voice to a confidential whisper, "there are only two styles of portrait painting—the serious and the smirk; and we always use the serious for professional people (except actors sometimes), and the smirk for private ladies and gentlemen who don't care so much about looking clever."

Kate seemed highly amused by this information, and Miss La Creevy went on painting and talking with immovable complacency.

"What a number of officers you seem to paint!" said Kate, availing herself of a pause in the discourse, and glancing round the room.

"Number of what, child?" inquired Miss La Creevy, looking up from her work. "Character portraits, oh yes! They're not real military men, you know."

"No!"

"Bless your heart, of course not; only clerks and that, who hire a uniform coat to be painted in, and send it here in a carpet bag. Some artists," said Miss La Creevy, "keep a red coat, and charge seven-and-sixpence extra for hire and carmine; but I don't do that myself, for I don't consider it legitimate."

Drawing herself up as though she plumed herself greatly upon not resorting to these lures to catch sitters, Miss La Creevy applied herself more intently to her task: only raising her head occasionally, to look with unspeakable satisfaction at some touch she had just put in: and now and then giving Miss Nickleby to understand what particular feature she was at work upon at the moment; "not," she expressly observed, "that you should make it up for painting, my dear, but because it's our custom sometimes to tell sitters what part we are upon, in order that, if there's any particular expression they want introduced, they may throw it in at the time, you know."

"And when," said Miss La Creevy after a long silence, to wit, an interval of full a minute

and a half, "when do you expect to see your uncle again?"

"I scarcely know; I had expected to have seen him before now," replied Kate. "Soon I hope, for this state of uncertainty is worse than anything."

"I suppose he has money, hasn't he?" inquired Miss La Creevy.

"He is very rich, I have heard," rejoined Kate. "I don't know that he is, but I believe so."

"Ah! you may depend upon it he is, or he wouldn't be so surly," remarked Miss La Creevy, who was an odd little mixture of shrewdness and simplicity. "When a man's a bear, he is generally pretty independent."

"His manner is rough," said Kate.

"Rough!" cried Miss La Creevy, "a porcupine's a feather bed to him! I never met with such a cross-grained old savage."

"It is only his manner, I believe," observed Kate timidly; "he was disappointed in early life, I think I have heard, or has had his temper soured by some calamity. I should be sorry to think ill of him until I knew he deserved it."

"Well; that's very right and proper," observed the miniature painter, "and Heaven forbid that I should be the cause of your doing so! But, now, mightn't he, without feeling it himself, make you and your mamma some nice little allowance that would keep you both comfortable until you were well married, and be a little fortune to her afterwards? What would a hundred a year, for instance, be to him?"

"I don't know what it would be to him," said Kate with energy, "but it would be that to me I would rather die than take."

"Heyday!" cried Miss La Creevy.

"A dependence upon him," said Kate, "would embitter my whole life. I should feel begging a far less degradation."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy. "This of a relation whom you will not hear an indifferent person speak ill of, my dear, sounds oddly enough, I confess."

"I dare say it does," replied Kate, speaking more gently; "indeed, I am sure it must. I—I—only mean that with the feelings and recollection of better times upon me, I could not bear to live on anybody's bounty—not his particularly, but anybody's."

Miss La Creevy looked slily at her companion, as if she doubted whether Ralph himself were not the subject of dislike, but, seeing that her young friend was distressed, made no remark.

"I only ask of him," continued Kate, whose tears fell while she spoke, "that he will move so little out of his way, in my behalf, as to enable me by his recommendation—only by his recommendation—to earn, literally, my bread, and remain with my mother. Whether we shall ever taste happiness again depends upon the fortunes of my dear brother; but if he will do this, and Nicholas only tells us that he is well and cheerful, I shall be contented."

As she ceased to speak, there was a rustling behind the screen which stood between her and the door, and some person knocked at the wainscot.

"Come in, whoever it is!" cried Miss La Creevy.

The person complied, and, coming forward at once, gave to view the form and features of no less an individual than Mr. Ralph Nickleby himself.

"Your servant, ladies," said Ralph, looking sharply at them by turns. "You were talking so loud, that I was unable to make you hear."

When the man of business had a more than commonly vicious snarl lurking at his heart, he had a trick of almost concealing his eyes under their thick and protruding brows for an instant, and then displaying them in their full keenness. As he did so now, and tried to keep down the smile which parted his thin compressed lips, and puckered up the bad lines about his mouth, they both felt certain that some part, if not the whole, of their recent conversation had been overheard.

"I called in, on my way up-stairs, more than half expecting to find you here," said Ralph, addressing his niece, and looking contemptuously at the portrait. "Is that my niece's portrait, ma'am?"

"Yes, it is, Mr. Nickleby," said Miss La Creevy with a very sprightly air, "and, between you and me and the post, sir, it will be a very nice portrait too, though I say it who am the painter."

"Don't trouble yourself to show it to me, ma'am," cried Ralph, moving away, "I have no eye for likenesses. Is it nearly finished?"

"Why, yes," replied Miss La Creevy, considering, with the pencil end of her brush in her mouth. "Two sittings more will——"

"Have them at once, ma'am," said Ralph. "She'll have no time to idle over fooleries after to-morrow. Work, ma'am, work; we must all work. Have you let your lodgings, ma'am?"

"I have not put a bill up yet, sir."

"Put it up at once, ma'am; they won't want the rooms after this week, or, if they do, can't pay for them. Now, my dear, if you're ready, we'll lose no more time."

With an assumption of kindness which sat worse upon him even than his usual manner, Mr. Ralph Nickleby motioned to the young lady to precede him, and, bowing gravely to Miss La Creevy, closed the door and followed up-stairs, where Mrs. Nickleby received him with many expressions of regard. Stopping them somewhat abruptly, Ralph waved his hand with an impatient gesture, and proceeded to the object of his visit.

"I have found a situation for your daughter, ma'am," said Ralph.

"Well!" replied Mrs. Nickleby. "Now, I will say that that is only just what I have expected of you. 'Depend upon it,' I said to Kate only yesterday morning at breakfast, 'that after your uncle has provided, in that most ready manner, for Nicholas, he will not leave us until he has done at least the same for you.' These were my very words, as near as I remember. Kate, my dear, why don't you thank your——"

"Let me proceed, ma'am, pray," said Ralph, interrupting his sister-in-law in the full torrent of her discourse.

"Kate, my love, let your uncle proceed," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"I am most anxious that he should, mamma," rejoined Kate.

"Well, my dear, if you are anxious that he should, you had better allow your uncle to say what he has to say without interruption," observed Mrs. Nickleby with many small nods and frowns. "Your uncle's time is very valuable, my dear: and, however desirous you may be—and naturally desirous, as I am sure any affectionate relations who have seen so little of your uncle as we have must naturally be—to protract the pleasure of having him among us, still, we are bound not to be selfish, but to take into consideration the important nature of his occupations in the City."

"I am very much obliged to you, ma'am," said Ralph with a scarcely perceptible sneer. "An absence of business habits in this family leads, apparently, to a great waste of words before business—when it does come under consideration—is arrived at at all."

"I fear it is so indeed," replied Mrs. Nickleby with a sigh. "Your poor brother——"

"My poor brother, ma'am," interposed Ralph tartly, "had no idea what business was—was unacquainted, I verily believe, with the very meaning of the word."

"I fear he was," said Mrs. Nickleby with her handkerchief to her eyes. "If it hadn't been for me, I don't know what would have become of him."

What strange creatures we are! The slight bait so skilfully thrown out by Ralph, on their first interview, was dangling on the hook yet. At every small deprivation or discomfort which presented itself in the course of the four-and-twenty hours to remind her of her straitened and altered circumstances, peevish visions of her dower of one thousand pounds had arisen before Mrs. Nickleby's mind, until, at last, she had come to persuade herself that of all her late husband's creditors she was the worst used, and the most to be pitied. And yet she had loved him dearly for many years, and had no greater share of selfishness than is the usual lot of mortals. Such is the irritability of sudden poverty. A decent annuity would have restored her thoughts to their old train at once.

"Repining is of no use, ma'am," said Ralph. "Of all fruitless errands, sending a tear to look after a day that is gone is the most fruitless."

"So it is," sobbed Mrs. Nickleby. "So it is."

"As you feel so keenly, in your own purse and person, the consequences of inattention to business, ma'am," said Ralph, "I am sure you will impress upon your children the necessity of attaching themselves to it early in life."

"Of course I must see that," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby. "Sad experience, you know, brother-in-law.—Kate, my dear, put that down in the next letter to Nicholas, or remind me to do it if I write."

Ralph paused for a few moments, and, seeing that he had now made pretty sure of the mother, in case the daughter objected to his proposition, went on to say:

"The situation that I have made interest to procure, ma'am, is with—with a milliner and dressmaker, in short."

"A milliner!" cried Mrs. Nickleby.

"A milliner and dressmaker, ma'am," replied Ralph. "Dressmakers in London, as I need not remind you, ma'am, who are so well acquainted with all matters in the ordinary routine of life, make large fortunes, keep equipages, and become persons of great wealth and fortune."

Now, the first ideas called up in Mrs. Nickleby's mind by the words milliner and dressmaker were connected with certain wicker baskets lined with black oil-skin, which she remembered to have seen carried to and fro in the streets; but, as Ralph proceeded, these disappeared, and were replaced by visions of large houses at the West-end, neat private carriages, and a banker's book; all of which images succeeded each other with such rapidity, that he had no sooner finished speaking than she nodded her head and said,

"Very true," with great appearance of satisfaction.

"What your uncle says is very true, Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby. "I recollect, when your poor papa and I came to town after we were married, that a young lady brought me home a chip cottage bonnet, with white and green trimming, and green persian lining, in her own carriage, which drove up to the door full gallop;—at least, I am not quite certain whether it was her own carriage or a hackney chariot, but I remember very well that the horse dropped down dead as he was turning round, and that your poor papa said he hadn't had any corn for a fortnight."

This anecdote, so strikingly illustrative of the opulence of milliners, was not received with any great demonstration of feeling, inasmuch as Kate hung down her head while it was relating, and Ralph manifested very intelligible symptoms of extreme impatience.

"The lady's name," said Ralph, hastily striking in, "is Mantalini—Madame Mantalini. I know her. She lives near Cavendish Square. If your daughter is disposed to try after the situation, I'll take her there directly."

"Have you nothing to say to your uncle, my love?" inquired Mrs. Nickleby.

"A great deal," replied Kate; "but not now. I would rather speak to him when we are alone;—it will save his time if I thank him, and say what I wish to say to him, as we walk along."

With these words Kate hurried away to hide the traces of emotion that were stealing down her face, and to prepare herself for the walk, while Mrs. Nickleby amused her brother-in-law by giving him, with many tears, a detailed account of the dimensions of a rosewood cabinet piano they had possessed in their days of affluence, together with a minute description of eight drawing-room chairs, with turned legs and green chintz squabs to match the curtains, which had cost two pounds fifteen shillings apiece, and had gone at the sale for a mere nothing.

These reminiscences were at length cut short by Kate's return in her walking dress, when Ralph, who had been fretting and fuming during the whole time of her absence, lost no time, and used very little ceremony, in descending into the street.

"Now," he said, taking her arm, "walk as fast as you can, and you'll get into the step that you'll have to walk to business with every morning." So saying, he led Kate off, at a good round pace, towards Cavendish Square.

"I am very much obliged to you, uncle," said the young lady after they had hurried on in silence for some time; "very."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Ralph. "I hope you'll do your duty."

"I will try to please, uncle," replied Kate: "indeed I——"

"Don't begin to cry," growled Ralph; "I hate crying."

"It's very foolish I know, uncle," began poor Kate.

"It is," replied Ralph, stopping her short, "and very affected besides. Let me see no more of it."

Perhaps this was not the best way to dry the tears of a young and sensitive female, about to make her first entry on an entirely new scene of life, among cold and uninteresting strangers; but it had its effect notwithstanding. Kate coloured deeply, breathed quickly for a few moments, and then walked on with a firmer and more determined step.

It was a curious contrast to see how the timid country girl shrunk through the crowd that hurried up and down the streets, giving way to the press of people, and clinging closely to Ralph, as though she feared to lose him in the throng; and how the stern and hard-featured man of business went doggedly on, elbowing the passengers aside, and now and then exchanging a gruff salutation with some passing acquaintance, who turned to look back upon his pretty charge with looks expressive of surprise, and seemed to wonder at the ill-assorted companionship. But, it would have been a stranger contrast still to have read the hearts that were beating side by side; to have laid bare the gentle innocence of the one, and the rugged villainy of the other; to have hung upon the guileless thoughts of the affectionate girl, and been amazed that, among all the wily plots and calculations of the old man, there should not be one word or figure denoting thought of death or of the grave. But so it was; and, stranger still—though this is a thing of every day—the warm young heart palpitated with a thousand anxieties and apprehensions, while that of the old worldly man lay rusting in its cell, beating only as a piece of cunning mechanism, and yielding no one throb of hope, or fear, or love, or care for any living thing.

"Uncle," said Kate when she judged they must be near their destination, "I must ask one question of you. I am to live at home?"

"At home!" replied Ralph; "where's that?"

"I mean with my mother—the *widow*," said Kate emphatically.

"You will live, to all intents and purposes,

here," rejoined Ralph; "for here you will take your meals, and here you will be from morning till night—occasionally, perhaps, till morning again."

"But at night, I mean," said Kate; "I cannot leave her, uncle. I must have some place that I can call a home; it will be wherever she is, you know, and may be a very humble one."

"May be!" said Ralph, walking faster, in the impatience provoked by the remark; "must be, you mean. May be a humble one! Is the girl mad?"

"The word slipped from my lips; I did not mean it indeed," urged Kate.

"I hope not," said Ralph.

"But my question, uncle; you have not answered it."

"Why, I anticipated something of the kind," said Ralph; "and—though I object very strongly, mind—have provided against it. I spoke of you as an out-of-door worker; so you will go to this home that may be humble every night."

There was comfort in this. Kate poured forth many thanks for her uncle's consideration, which Ralph received as if he had deserved them all, and they arrived without any further conversation at the dressmaker's door, which displayed a very large plate, with Madame Mantalini's name and occupation, and was approached by a handsome flight of steps. There was a shop to the house, but it was let off to an importer of otto of roses. Madame Mantalini's show-rooms were on the first floor: a fact which was notified to the nobility and gentry by the casual exhibition, near the handsomely-curtained windows, of two or three elegant bonnets of the newest fashion, and some costly garments in the most approved taste.

A liveried footman opened the door, and, in reply to Ralph's inquiry whether Madame Mantalini was at home, ushered them, through a handsome hall and up a spacious staircase, into the show saloon, which comprised two spacious drawing-rooms, and exhibited an immense variety of superb dresses and materials for dresses: some arranged on stands, others laid carelessly on sofas, and others, again, scattered over the carpet, hanging on the cheval-glasses, or mingling, in some other way, with the rich furniture of various descriptions which was profusely displayed.

They waited here a much longer time than was agreeable to Mr. Ralph Nickleby, who eyed the gaudy frippery about him with very little concern, and was at length about to pull the bell, when a gentleman suddenly popped his head into the room, and, seeing somebody there, as suddenly popped it out again.

"Here! Hollo!" cried Ralph. "Who's that?"

At the sound of Ralph's voice, the head reappeared, and the mouth, displaying a very long row of very white teeth, uttered in a mincing tone the words, "Demmit! What, Nickleby! Oh, demmit!" Having uttered which ejaculations, the gentleman advanced, and shook hands with Ralph with great warmth. He was dressed in a gorgeous morning gown, with a waistcoat and Turkish trousers of the same pattern, a pink silk neckerchief, and bright green slippers, and had a very copious watch-chain wound round his body. Moreover, he had whiskers and a moustache, both dyed black and gracefully curled.

"Demmit, you don't mean to say you want me, do you, demmit?" said this gentleman, smiting Ralph on the shoulder.

"Not yet," said Ralph sarcastically.

"Ha! ha! demmit," cried the gentleman; when, wheeling round to laugh with greater elegance, he encountered Kate Nickleby, who was standing near.

"My niece," said Ralph.

"I remember," said the gentleman, striking his nose with the knuckle of his forefinger as a chastening for his forgetfulness. "Demmit, I remember what you come for. Step this way, Nickleby. My dear, will you follow me? Ha! ha! They all follow me, Nickleby; always did, demmit, always."

Giving loose to the playfulness of his imagination after this fashion, the gentleman led the way to a private sitting-room on the second floor, scarcely less elegantly furnished than the apartment below, where the presence of a silver coffee-pot, an egg-shell, and sloppy china for one, seemed to show that he had just breakfasted.

"Sit down, my dear," said the gentleman: first staring Miss Nickleby out of countenance, and then grinning in delight at the achievement. "This cursed high room takes one's breath away. These infernal sky parlours—I'm afraid I must move, Nickleby."

"I would by all means," replied Ralph, looking bitterly round.

"What a demd rum fellow you are, Nickleby!" said the gentleman; "the demdest, longest-headed, queerest-tempered old coiner of gold and silver ever was—demmit!"

Having complimented Ralph to this effect, the gentleman rang the bell, and stared at Miss Nickleby until it was answered, when he left off to bid the man desire his mistress to come

directly; after which he began again, and left off no more until Madame Mantalini appeared.

The dressmaker was a buxom person, handsomely dressed and rather good-looking, but much older than the gentleman in the Turkish trousers, whom she had wedded some six months before. His name was originally Muntle; but it had been converted, by an easy transition, into Mantalini: the lady rightly considering that an English appellation would be of serious injury to the business. He had married on his whiskers; upon which property he had previously subsisted, in a genteel manner, for some years; and which he had recently improved, after patient cultivation, by the addition of a moustache, which promised to secure him an easy independence: his share in the labours of the business being at present confined to spending the money, and occasionally, when that ran short, driving to Mr. Ralph Nickleby to procure discount—at a per-centage—for the customers' bills.

"My life," said Mr. Mantalini, "what a demd devil of a time you have been!"

"I didn't even know Mr. Nickleby was here, my love," said Madame Mantalini.

"Then what a doubly demd infernal rascal that footman must be, my soul!" remonstrated Mr. Mantalini.

"My dear," said madame, "that is entirely your fault."

"My fault, my heart's joy?"

"Certainly," returned the lady; "what can you expect, dearest, if you will not correct the man?"

"Correct the man, my soul's delight!"

"Yes; I am sure he wants speaking to badly enough," said madame, pouting.

"Then do not vex itself," said Mr. Mantalini; "he shall be horsewhipped till he cries out demnebly." With this promise Mr. Mantalini kissed Madame Mantalini, and, after that performance, Madame Mantalini pulled Mr. Mantalini playfully by the ear: which done, they descended to business.

"Now, ma'am," said Ralph, who had looked on at all this with such scorn as few men can express in looks, "this is my niece."

"Just so, Mr. Nickleby," replied Madame Mantalini, surveying Kate from head to foot, and back again. "Can you speak French, child?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Kate, not daring to look up; for she felt that the eyes of the odious man in the dressing-gown were directed towards her.

"Like a demd native?" asked the husband.

Miss Nickleby offered no reply to this inquiry, but turned her back upon the questioner, as if addressing herself to make answer to what his wife might demand.

"We keep twenty young women constantly employed in the establishment," said madame.

"Indeed, ma'am!" replied Kate timidly.

"Yes; and some of 'em demd handsome, too," said the master.

"Mantalini!" exclaimed his wife in an awful voice.

"My senses' idol!" said Mantalini.

"Do you wish to break my heart?"

"Not for twenty thousand hemispheres populated with—with—with little ballet-dancers," replied Mantalini in a poetical strain.

"Then you will if you persevere in that mode of speaking," said his wife. "What can Mr. Nickleby think when he hears you?"

"Oh! Nothing, ma'am, nothing," replied Ralph. "I know his amiable nature, and yours—mere little remarks that give a zest to your daily intercourse—lovers' quarrels that add sweetness to those domestic joys which promise to last so long—that's all; that's all."

If an iron door could be supposed to quarrel with its hinges, and to make a firm resolution to open with slow obstinacy, and grind them to powder in the process, it would emit a pleasanter sound in so doing than did these words in the rough and bitter voice in which they were uttered by Ralph. Even Mr. Mantalini felt their influence, and, turning affrighted round, exclaimed: "What a demd horrid croaking!"

"You will pay no attention, if you please, to what Mr. Mantalini says," observed his wife, addressing Miss Nickleby.

"I do not, ma'am," said Kate with quiet contempt.

"Mr. Mantalini knows nothing whatever about any of the young women," continued madame, looking at her husband, and speaking to Kate. "If he has seen any of them, he must have seen them in the street, going to, or returning from, their work, and not here. He was never even in the room. I do not allow it. What hours of work have you been accustomed to?"

"I have never yet been accustomed to work at all, ma'am," replied Kate in a low voice.

"For which reason she'll work all the better now," said Ralph, putting in a word, lest this confession should injure the negotiation.

"I hope so," returned Madame Mantalini; "our hours are from nine to nine, with extra work when we're very full of business, for which I allow payment as overtime."

Kate bowed her head to intimate that she heard, and was satisfied.

"Your meals," continued Madame Mantalini, "that is, dinner and tea, you will take here. I should think your wages would average from five to seven shillings a week; but I can't give you any certain information on that point until I see what you can do."

Kate bowed her head again.

"If you're ready to come," said Madame Mantalini, "you had better begin on Monday morning at nine exactly, and Miss Knag, the forewoman, shall then have directions to try you with some easy work at first. Is there anything more, Mr. Nickleby?"

"Nothing more, ma'am," replied Ralph, rising.

"Then I believe that's all," said the lady. Having arrived at this natural conclusion, she looked at the door, as if she wished to be gone, but hesitated notwithstanding, as though unwilling to leave Mr. Mantalini the sole honour of showing them down-stairs. Ralph relieved her from her perplexity by taking his departure without delay: Madame Mantalini making many gracious inquiries why he never came to see them; and Mr. Mantalini anathematizing the stairs with great volubility as he followed them down, in the hope of inducing Kate to look round,—a hope, however, which was destined to remain ungratified.

"There!" said Ralph when they got into the street; "now you're provided for."

Kate was about to thank him again, but he stopped her.

"I had some idea," he said, "of providing for your mother in a pleasant part of the country—(he had a presentation to some almshouses on the borders of Cornwall, which had occurred to him more than once)—but, as you want to be together, I must do something else for her. She has a little money?"

"A very little," replied Kate.

"A little will go a long way if it's used sparingly," said Ralph. "She must see how long she can make it last, living rent free. You leave your lodgings on Saturday?"

"You told us to do so, uncle."

"Yes; there is a house empty that belongs to me, which I can put you into till it is let, and then, if nothing else turns up, perhaps I shall have another. You must live there."

"Is it far from here, sir?" inquired Kate.

"Pretty well," said Ralph; "in another quarter of the town—at the East-end; but I'll send my clerk down to you, at five o'clock on Saturday, to take you there. Good-bye. You know your way? Straight on."

Coldly shaking his niece's hand, Ralph left her at the top of Regent Street, and turned down a by-thoroughfare, intent on schemes of money-getting. Kate walked sadly back to their lodgings in the Strand.

CHAPTER XI.

NEWMAN NOGGS INDUCTS MRS. AND MISS NICKLEBY INTO THEIR NEW DWELLING IN THE CITY.

MISS NICKLEBY'S reflections, as she wended her way homewards, were of that desponding nature which the occurrences of the morning had been sufficiently calculated to awaken. Her uncle's was not a manner likely to dispel any doubts or apprehensions she might have formed in the outset, neither was the glimpse she had had of Madame Mantalini's establishment by any means encouraging. It was with many gloomy forebodings and misgivings, therefore, that she looked forward, with a heavy heart, to the opening of her new career.

If her mother's consolations could have restored her to a pleasanter and more enviable state of mind, there were abundance of them to produce the effect. By the time Kate reached home, the good lady had called to mind two authentic cases of milliners who had been possessed of considerable property, though whether they had acquired it all in business, or had had a capital to start with, or had been lucky and married to advantage, she could not exactly remember. However, as she very logically remarked, there must have been some young person in that way of business who had made a fortune without having anything to begin with, and that being taken for granted, why should not Kate do the same? Miss La Creevy, who was a member of the little council, ventured to insinuate some doubts relative to the probability of Miss Nickleby's arriving at this happy consummation in the compass of an ordinary lifetime; but the good lady set that question entirely at rest by informing them that she had a presentiment on the subject—a species of second-sight with which she had been in the habit of clenching every argument with the deceased Mr. Nickleby, and, in nine cases and three-quarters out of every ten, determining it the wrong way.

"I am afraid it is an unhealthy occupation," said Miss La Creevy. "I recollect getting three young milliners to sit to me when I first began

to paint, and I remember that they were all very pale and sickly."

"Oh! that's not a general rule by any means," observed Mrs. Nickleby; "for I remember, as well as if it was only yesterday, employing one that I was particularly recommended to, to make me a scarlet cloak at the time when scarlet cloaks were fashionable, and she had a very red face—a very red face indeed."

"Perhaps she drank," suggested Miss La Creevy.

"I don't know how that may have been," returned Mrs. Nickleby; "but I know she had a very red face, so your argument goes for nothing."

In this manner, and with like powerful reasoning, did the worthy matron meet every little objection that presented itself to the new scheme of the morning. Happy Mrs. Nickleby! A project had but to be new, and it came home to her mind brightly varnished and gilded as a glittering toy.

This question disposed of, Kate communicated her uncle's desire about the empty house, to which Mrs. Nickleby assented with equal readiness, characteristically remarking that, on the fine evenings, it would be a pleasant amusement for her to walk to the West-end to fetch her daughter home; and no less characteristically forgetting that there were such things as wet nights and bad weather to be encountered in almost every week of the year.

"I shall be sorry—truly sorry to leave you, my kind friend," said Kate, on whom the good feeling of the poor miniature painter had made a deep impression.

"You shall not shake me off, for all that," replied Miss La Creevy with as much sprightliness as she could assume. "I shall see you very often, and come and hear how you get on; and if, in all London, or all the wide world besides, there is no other heart that takes an interest in your welfare, there will be one little lonely woman that prays for it night and day."

With this, the poor soul, who had a heart big enough for Gog, the guardian genius of London, and enough to spare for Magog to boot, after making a great many extraordinary faces which would have secured her an ample fortune, could she have transferred them to ivory or canvas, sat down in a corner, and had what she termed "a real good cry."

But no crying, or talking, or hoping, or fearing could keep off the dreaded Saturday afternoon, or Newman Noggs either; who, punctual to his time, limped up to the door, and breathed a whiff of cordial gin through the keyhole, exactly as such of the church clocks in the neighbourhood as agreed among themselves about the time struck five. Newman waited for the last stroke, and then knocked.

"From Mr. Ralph Nickleby," said Newman, announcing his errand, when he got up-stairs, with all possible brevity.

"We shall be ready directly," said Kate. "We have not much to carry, but I fear we must have a coach."

"I'll get one," replied Newman.

"Indeed you shall not trouble yourself," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"I will," said Newman.

"I can't suffer you to think of such a thing," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"You can't help it," said Newman.

"Not help it!"

"No; I thought of it as I came along; but didn't get one, thinking you mightn't be ready. I think of a great many things. Nobody can prevent that."

"Oh yes, I understand you, Mr. Noggs!" said Mrs. Nickleby. "Our thoughts are free, of course. Everybody's thoughts are their own, clearly."

"They wouldn't be if some people had their way," muttered Newman.

"Well, no more they would, Mr. Noggs, and that's very true," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby. "Some people, to be sure, are such—— How's your master?"

Newman darted a meaning glance at Kate, and replied, with a strong emphasis on the last word of his answer, that Mr. Ralph Nickleby was well, and sent his *love*.

"I am sure we are very much obliged to him," observed Mrs. Nickleby.

"Very," said Newman. "I'll tell him so."

It was no very easy matter to mistake Newman Noggs, after having once seen him, and as Kate, attracted by the singularity of his manner (in which, on this occasion, however, there was something respectful and even delicate, notwithstanding the abruptness of his speech), looked at him more closely, she recollected having caught a passing glimpse of that strange figure before.

"Excuse my curiosity," she said, "but did I not see you in the coach-yard on the morning my brother went away to Yorkshire?"

Newman cast a wistful glance on Mrs. Nickleby, and said "No" most unblushingly.

"No!" exclaimed Kate. "I should have said so anywhere."

"You'd have said wrong," rejoined Newman. "It's the first time I've been out for three weeks. I've had the gout."

Newman was very, very far from having the appearance of a gouty subject, and so Kate could not help thinking; but the conference was cut short by Mrs. Nickleby's insisting on having the door shut, lest Mr. Noggs should take cold, and further persisted in sending the servant-girl for a coach, for fear he should bring on another attack of his disorder. To both conditions Newman was compelled to yield. Presently the coach came; and, after many sorrowful farewells, and a great deal of running backwards and forwards across the pavement on the part of Miss La Creevy, in the course of which the yellow turban came into violent contact with sundry foot-passengers, it (that is to say, the coach, not the turban) went away again, with the two ladies and their luggage inside; and Newman, despite all Mrs. Nickleby's assurances that it would be his death, on the box beside the driver.

They went into the City, turning down by the river-side; and, after a long and very slow drive, the streets being crowded at that hour with vehicles of every kind, stopped in front of a large old dingy house in Thames Street: the door and windows of which were so bespattered with mud, that it would have appeared to have been uninhabited for years.

The door of this deserted mansion Newman opened with a key which he took out of his hat—in which, by-the-bye, in consequence of the dilapidated state of his pockets, he deposited everything, and would most likely have carried his money if he had had any—and the coach being discharged, he led the way into the interior of the mansion.

Old, and gloomy, and black, in truth, it was, and sullen and dark were the rooms, once so bustling with life and enterprise. There was a wharf behind, opening on the Thames. An empty dog-kennel, some bones of animals, fragments of iron hoops, and staves of old casks lay strewn about, but no life was stirring there. It was a picture of cold, silent decay.

"This house depresses and chills one," said Kate, "and seems as if some blight had fallen on it. If I were superstitious, I should be almost inclined to believe that some dreadful crime had been perpetrated within these old walls, and that the place had never prospered since. How frowning and how dark it looks!"

"Lord, my dear," replied Mrs. Nickleby, "don't talk in that way, or you'll frighten me to death."

"It is only my foolish fancy, mamma," said Kate, forcing a smile.

"Well, then, my love, I wish you would keep your foolish fancy to yourself, and not wake up *my* foolish fancy to keep it company," retorted Mrs. Nickleby. "Why didn't you think of all this before?—you are so careless—we might have asked Miss La Creevy to keep us company, or borrowed a dog, or a thousand things—but it always was the way, and was just the same with your poor dear father. Unless I thought of everything——" This was Mrs. Nickleby's usual commencement of a general lamentation, running through a dozen or so of complicated sentences addressed to nobody in particular, and into which she now launched until her breath was exhausted.

Newman appeared not to hear these remarks, but preceded them to a couple of rooms on the first floor, which some kind of attempt had been made to render habitable. In one were a few chairs, a table, an old hearth-rug, and some faded baize; and a fire was ready laid in the grate. In the other stood an old tent bedstead, and a few scanty articles of chamber furniture.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, trying to be pleased, "now isn't this thoughtful and considerate of your uncle? Why, we should not have had anything but the bed we bought yesterday to lie down upon, if it hadn't been for his thoughtfulness!"

"Very kind indeed," replied Kate, looking round.

Newman Noggs did not say that he had hunted up the old furniture they saw, from attic and cellar; or that he had taken in the half-penny-worth of milk for tea that stood upon a shelf, or filled the rusty kettle on the hob, or collected the wood-chips from the wharf, or begged the coals. But the notion of Ralph Nickleby having directed it to be done tickled his fancy so much, that he could not refrain from cracking all his ten fingers in succession: at which performance Mrs. Nickleby was rather startled at first, but, supposing it to be in some remote manner connected with the gout, did not remark upon.

"We need detain you no longer, I think," said Kate.

"Is there nothing I can do?" asked Newman.

"Nothing, thank you," rejoined Miss Nickleby.

"Perhaps, my dear, Mr. Noggs would like to drink our healths," said Mrs. Nickleby, fumbling in her reticule for some small coin.

"I think, mamma," said Kate, hesitating and remarking Newman's averted face, "you would hurt his feelings if you offered it."

Newman Noggs, bowing to the young lady more like a gentleman than the miserable wretch he seemed, placed his hand upon his breast,

and, pausing for a moment with the air of a man who struggles to speak, but is uncertain what to say, quitted the room.

As the jarring echoes of the heavy house-door, closing on its latch, reverberated dismally through the building, Kate felt half tempted to call him back, and beg him to remain a little while; but she was ashamed to own her fears, and Newman Noggs was on his road homewards.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREBY THE READER WILL BE ENABLED TO TRACE THE FURTHER COURSE OF MISS FANNY SQUEERS'S LOVE, AND TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER IT RAN SMOOTH OR OTHERWISE.

IT was a fortunate circumstance for Miss Fanny Squeers that, when her worthy papa returned home on the night of the small

"KATE WALKED SADLY BACK TO THEIR LODGINGS IN THE STRAND."

tea-party, he was what the initiated term "too far gone" to observe the numerous tokens of extreme vexation of spirit which were plainly visible in her countenance. Being, however, of a rather violent and quarrelsome mood in his cups, it is not impossible that he might have fallen out with her, either on this or some imaginary topic, if the young lady had not, with a foresight and prudence highly commendable, kept a boy up, on purpose, to bear the first brunt of the good gentleman's anger; which, having vented itself in a variety of kicks and cuffs, subsided sufficiently to admit of his being persuaded to go to bed. Which he did with his boots on, and an umbrella under his arm.

The hungry servant attended Miss Squeers in her own room, according to custom, to curl her hair, perform the other little offices of her toilet, and administer as much flattery as she could get up for the purpose; for Miss Squeers was quite lazy enough (and sufficiently vain and frivolous withal) to have been a fine lady; and it was only the arbitrary distinctions of rank

and station which prevented her from being one.

"How lovely your hair do curl to-night, miss!" said the handmaiden. "I declare if it isn't a pity and a shame to brush it out!"

"Hold your tongue!" replied Miss Squeers wrathfully.

Some considerable experience prevented the girl from being at all surprised at any outbreak of ill-temper on the part of Miss Squeers. Having a half-perception of what had occurred in the course of the evening, she changed her mode of making herself agreeable, and proceeded on the indirect tack.

"Well, I couldn't help saying, miss, if you was to kill me for it," said the attendant, "that I never see nobody look so vulgar as Miss Price this night."

Miss Squeers sighed, and composed herself to listen.

"I know it's very wrong in me to say so, miss," continued the girl, delighted to see the impression she was making, "Miss Price being a friend of yourn, and all; but she do dress herself out so, and go on in such a manner to get noticed, that—oh!—well, if people only saw themselves!"

"What do you mean, Phib?" asked Miss Squeers, looking in her own little glass, where, like most of us, she saw—not herself, but the reflection of some pleasant image in her own brain. "How you talk!"

"Talk, miss! It's enough to make a tom-cat talk French grammar, only to see how she tosses her head," replied the handmaid.

"She *does* toss her head," observed Miss Squeers with an air of abstraction.

"So vain, and so very—very plain," said the girl.

"Poor 'Tilda!" sighed Miss Squeers compassionately.

"And always laying herself out so to get to be admired," pursued the servant. "Oh dear! It's positive indelicate."

"I can't allow you to talk in that way, Phib," said Miss Squeers. "'Tilda's friends are low people, and, if she don't know any better, it's their fault, and not hers."

"Well, but you know, miss," said Phœbe, for which name "Phib" was used as a patronising abbreviation, "if she was only to take copy by a friend—oh! if she only knew how wrong she was, and would but set herself right by you, what a nice young woman she might be in time!"

"Phib," rejoined Miss Squeers with a stately air, "it's not proper for me to hear these comparisons drawn; they make 'Tilda look a coarse improper sort of person, and it seems unfriendly in me to listen to them. I would rather you dropped the subject, Phib; at the same time, I must say that if 'Tilda Price would take pattern by somebody—not me particularly——"

"Oh yes; you, miss!" interposed Phib.

"Well, me, Phib, if you will have it so," said Miss Squeers. "I must say that if she would, she would be all the better for it."

"So somebody else thinks, or I am much mistaken," said the girl mysteriously.

"What do you mean?" demanded Miss Squeers.

"Never mind, miss," replied the girl; "*I* know what I know; that's all."

"Phib," said Miss Squeers dramatically, "I insist upon your explaining yourself. What is this dark mystery? Speak."

"Why, if you will have it, miss, it's this," said the servant-girl. "Mr. John Browdie thinks as you think; and, if he wasn't too far gone to do it creditable, he'd be very glad to be off with Miss Price, and on with Miss Squeers."

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed Miss Squeers, clasping her hands with great dignity. "What is this?"

"Truth, ma'am, and nothing but truth," replied the artful Phib.

"What a situation!" cried Miss Squeers; "on the brink of unconsciously destroying the peace and happiness of my own 'Tilda. What is the reason that men fall in love with me, whether I like it or not, and desert their chosen intendeds for my sake?"

"Because they can't help it, miss," replied the girl; "the reason's plain." (If Miss Squeers were the reason, it was very plain.)

"Never let me hear of it again," retorted Miss Squeers. "Never! Do you hear? 'Tilda Price has faults—many faults—but I wish her well, and, above all, I wish her married; for I think it highly desirable—most desirable from the very nature of her failings—that she should be married as soon as possible. No, Phib. Let her have Mr. Browdie. I may pity *him*, poor fellow; but I have a great regard for 'Tilda, and only hope she may make a better wife than I think she will."

With this effusion of feeling Miss Squeers went to bed.

Spite is a little word; but it represents as strange a jumble of feelings, and compound of discords, as any polysyllable in the language. Miss Squeers knew as well in her heart of hearts that what the miserable serving-girl had said was sheer, coarse, lying flattery as did the girl her-

self; yet the mere opportunity of venting a little ill-nature against the offending Miss Price, and affecting to compassionate her weaknesses and foibles, though only in the presence of a solitary dependant, was almost as great a relief to her spleen as if the whole had been gospel truth. Nay, more. We have such extraordinary powers of persuasion, when they are exerted over ourselves, that Miss Squeers felt quite high-minded and great after her noble renunciation of John Browdie's hand, and looked down upon her rival with a kind of holy calmness and tranquillity, that had a mighty effect in soothing her ruffled feelings.

This happy state of mind had some influence in bringing about a reconciliation; for, when a knock came at the front-door next day, and the miller's daughter was announced, Miss Squeers betook herself to the parlour in a Christian frame of spirit, perfectly beautiful to behold.

"Well, Fanny," said the miller's daughter, "you see I have come to see you, although we *had* some words last night."

"I pity your bad passions, 'Tilda," replied Miss Squeers; "but I bear no malice. I am above it."

"Don't be cross, Fanny," said Miss Price. "I have come to tell you something that I know will please you."

"What may that be, 'Tilda?" demanded Miss Squeers; screwing up her lips, and looking as if nothing in earth, air, fire, or water could afford her the slightest gleam of satisfaction.

"This," rejoined Miss Price. "After we left here last night John and I had a dreadful quarrel."

"That doesn't please me," said Miss Squeers—relaxing into a smile, though.

"Lor! I wouldn't think so bad of you as to suppose it did," rejoined her companion. "That's not it."

"Oh!" said Miss Squeers, relapsing into melancholy. "Go on."

"After a great deal of wrangling, and saying we would never see each other any more," continued Miss Price, "we made it up, and this morning John went and wrote our names down to be put up, for the first time, next Sunday, so we shall be married in three weeks, and I give you notice to get your frock made."

There was mingled gall and honey in this intelligence. The prospect of the friend's being married so soon was the gall, and the certainty of her not entertaining serious designs upon Nicholas was the honey. Upon the whole, the sweet greatly preponderated over the bitter, so Miss Squeers said she would get the frock made, and that she hoped 'Tilda might be happy, though at the same time she didn't know, and would not have her build too much upon it, for men were strange creatures, and a great many married women were very miserable, and wished themselves single again with all their hearts; to which condolences Miss Squeers added others equally calculated to raise her friend's spirits and promote her cheerfulness of mind.

"But come now, Fanny," said Miss Price, "I want to have a word or two with you about young Mr. Nickleby."

"He is nothing to me," interrupted Miss Squeers with hysterical symptoms. "I despise him too much!"

"Oh, you don't mean that, I am sure!" replied her friend. "Confess, Fanny; don't you like him now?"

Without returning any direct reply, Miss Squeers, all at once, fell into a paroxysm of spiteful tears, and exclaimed that she was a wretched, neglected, miserable castaway.

"I hate everybody," said Miss Squeers, "and I wish that everybody was dead—that I do."

"Dear, dear!" said Miss Price, quite moved by this avowal of misanthropical sentiments. "You are not serious, I am sure."

"Yes, I am," rejoined Miss Squeers, tying tight knots in her pocket-handkerchief, and clenching her teeth. "And I wish *I* was dead too. There!"

"Oh! you'll think very differently in another five minutes," said Matilda. "How much better to take him into favour again than to hurt yourself by going on in that way! Wouldn't it be much nicer, now, to have him all to yourself on good terms, in a company-keeping love-making, pleasant sort of manner?"

"I don't know but what it would," sobbed Miss Squeers. "Oh, 'Tilda! how could you have acted so mean and dishonourable? I wouldn't have believed it of you, if anybody had told me."

"Heyday!" exclaimed Miss Price, giggling. "One would suppose I had been murdering somebody at least."

"Very nigh as bad," said Miss Squeers passionately.

"And all this because I happen to have enough of good looks to make people civil to me," cried Miss Price. "Persons don't make their own faces, and it's no more my fault if mine is a good one than it is other people's fault if theirs is a bad one."

"Hold your tongue," shrieked Miss Squeers in her shrillest tone; "or you'll make me slap

you, 'Tilda, and afterwards I should be sorry for it!"

It is needless to say that, by this time, the temper of each young lady was in some slight degree affected by the tone of her conversation, and that a dash of personality was infused into the altercation in consequence. Indeed, the quarrel, from slight beginnings, rose to a considerable height, and was assuming a very violent complexion, when both parties, falling into a great passion of tears, exclaimed simultaneously that they had never thought of being spoken to in that way: which exclamation, leading to a remonstrance, gradually brought on an explanation: and the upshot was that they fell into each other's arms and vowed eternal friendship; the occasion in question making the fifty-second time of repeating the same impressive ceremony within a twelvemonth.

Perfect amicability being thus restored, a dialogue naturally ensued upon the number and nature of the garments which would be indispensable for Miss Price's entrance into the holy state of matrimony, when Miss Squeers clearly showed that a great many more than the miller could, or would, afford were absolutely necessary, and could not decently be dispensed with. The young lady then, by an easy digression, led the discourse to her own wardrobe, and, after recounting its principal beauties at some length, took her friend up-stairs to make inspection thereof. The treasures of two drawers and a closet having been displayed, and all the smaller articles tried on, it was time for Miss Price to return home; and as she had been in raptures with all the frocks, and had been stricken quite dumb with admiration of a new pink scarf, Miss Squeers said, in high good humour, that she would walk part of the way with her, for the pleasure of her company; and off they went together: Miss Squeers dilating, as they walked along, upon her father's accomplishments: and multiplying his income by ten, to give her friend some faint notion of the vast importance and superiority of her family.

It happened that that particular time, comprising the short daily interval which was suffered to elapse between what was pleasantly called the dinner of Mr. Squeers's pupils, and their return to the pursuit of useful knowledge, was precisely the hour when Nicholas was accustomed to issue forth for a melancholy walk, and to brood, as he sauntered listlessly through the village, upon his miserable lot. Miss Squeers knew this perfectly well, but had perhaps forgotten it, for, when she caught sight of that young gentleman advancing towards them, she evinced many symptoms of surprise and consternation, and assured her friend that she "felt fit to drop into the earth."

"Shall we turn back, or run into a cottage?" asked Miss Price. "He don't see us yet."

"No, 'Tilda," replied Miss Squeers, "it is my duty to go through with it, and I will!"

As Miss Squeers said this in the tone of one who has made a high moral resolution, and was, besides, taken with one or two chokes and catchings of breath, indicative of feelings at a high pressure, her friend made no further remark, and they bore straight down upon Nicholas, who, walking with his eyes bent upon the ground, was not aware of their approach until they were close upon him; otherwise he might, perhaps, have taken shelter himself.

"Good morning," said Nicholas, bowing and passing by.

"He is going," murmured Miss Squeers. "I shall choke, 'Tilda."

"Come back, Mr. Nickleby, do!" cried Miss Price, affecting alarm at her friend's threat, but really actuated by a malicious wish to hear what Nicholas would say; "come back, Mr. Nickleby!"

Mr. Nickleby came back, and looked as confused as might be, as he inquired whether the ladies had any commands for him.

"Don't stop to talk," urged Miss Price hastily; "but support her on the other side. How do you feel now, dear?"

"Better," sighed Miss Squeers, laying a beaver bonnet, of a reddish brown, with a green veil attached, on Mr. Nickleby's shoulder. "This foolish faintness!"

"Don't call it foolish, dear," said Miss Price: her bright eye dancing with merriment as she saw the perplexity of Nicholas; "you have no reason to be ashamed of it. It's those who are too proud to come round again without all this to-do, that ought to be ashamed."

"You are resolved to fix it upon me, I see," said Nicholas, smiling, "although I told you, last night, it was not my fault."

"There! he says it was not his fault, my dear," remarked the wicked Miss Price. "Perhaps you were too jealous, or too hasty with him? He says it was not his fault. You hear; I think that's apology enough."

"You will not understand me," said Nicholas. "Pray dispense with this jesting, for I have no time, and really no inclination, to be the subject or promoter of mirth just now."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Price, affecting amazement.

"Don't ask him, 'Tilda," cried Miss Squeers; "I forgive him."

"Dear me!" said Nicholas as the brown bonnet went down on his shoulder again, "this is more serious than I supposed. Allow me! Will you have the goodness to hear me speak?"

Here he raised up the brown bonnet, and, regarding with most unfeigned astonishment a look of tender reproach from Miss Squeers, shrunk back a few paces to be out of the reach of the fair burden, and went on to say:

"I am very sorry—truly and sincerely sorry—for having been the cause of any difference among you last night. I reproach myself most bitterly for having been so unfortunate as to cause the dissension that occurred, although I did so, I assure you, most unwittingly and heedlessly."

"Well; that's not all you have got to say, surely?" exclaimed Miss Price as Nicholas paused.

"I fear there is something more," stammered Nicholas with a half-smile, and looking towards Miss Squeers; "it is a most awkward thing to say—but—the very mention of such a supposition makes one look like a puppy—still—may I ask if that lady supposes that I entertain any—in short, does she think that I am in love with her?"

"Delightful embarrassment!" thought Miss Squeers, "I have brought him to it at last. Answer for me, dear," she whispered to her friend.

"Does she think so?" rejoined Miss Price. "Of course she does."

"She does!" exclaimed Nicholas with such energy of utterance as might have been, for the moment, mistaken for rapture.

"Certainly," replied Miss Price.

"If Mr. Nickleby has doubted that, 'Tilda," said the blushing Miss Squeers in soft accents, "he may set his mind at rest. His sentiments are recipro——"

"Stop!" cried Nicholas hurriedly; "pray hear me. This is the grossest and wildest delusion, the completest and most signal mistake, that ever human being laboured under, or committed. I have scarcely seen the young lady half-a-dozen times, but if I had seen her sixty times, or am destined to see her sixty thousand, it would be, and will be, precisely the same. I have not one thought, wish, or hope connected with her, unless it be—and I say this, not to hurt her feelings, but to impress her with the real state of my own—unless it be the one object, dear to my heart as life itself, of being one day able to turn my back upon this accursed place, never to set foot in it again, or think of it—even think of it—but with loathing and disgust."

With this particularly plain and straightforward declaration, which he made with all the vehemence that his indignant and excited feelings could bring to bear upon it, Nicholas, waiting to hear no more, retreated.

But poor Miss Squeers! Her anger, rage, and vexation; the rapid succession of bitter and passionate feelings that whirled through her mind; are not to be described. Refused! refused by a teacher, picked up by advertisement, at an annual salary of five pounds payable at indefinite periods, and "found" in food and lodging like the very boys themselves: and this, too, in the presence of a little chit of a miller's daughter of eighteen, who was going to be married, in three weeks' time, to a man who had gone down on his very knees to ask her! She could have choked in right good earnest at the thought of being so humbled.

But, there was one thing clear in the midst of her mortification; and that was, that she hated and detested Nicholas with all the narrowness of mind and littleness of purpose worthy a descendant of the house of Squeers. And there was one comfort too; and that was, that every hour in every day she could wound his pride, and goad him with the infliction of some slight, or insult, or deprivation, which could not but have some effect on the most insensible person, and must be acutely felt by one so sensitive as Nicholas. With these two reflections uppermost in her mind, Miss Squeers made the best of the matter to her friend by observing that Mr. Nickleby was such an odd creature, and of such a violent temper, that she feared she should be obliged to give him up; and parted from her.

And here it may be remarked that Miss Squeers, having bestowed her affections (or whatever it might be that, in the absence of anything better, represented them) on Nicholas Nickleby, had never once seriously contemplated the possibility of his being of a different opinion from herself in the business. Miss Squeers reasoned that she was prepossessing and beautiful, and that her father was master, and Nicholas man. and that her father had saved money, and Nicholas had none, all of which seemed to her conclusive arguments why the young man should feel only too much honoured by her preference. She had not failed to recollect, either, how much more agreeable she could render his situation if she were his friend, and how much more disagreeable if she were his enemy; and, doubtless, many less scrupulous young gentlemen than Nicholas would have encouraged her extravagance, had it been only for this very obvious and intelligible reason.

However, he had thought proper to do otherwise, and Miss Squeers was outrageous.

"Let him see," said the irritated young lady when she had regained her own room, and eased her mind by committing an assault on Phib, "if I don't set mother against him a little more when she comes back!"

It was scarcely necessary to do this, but Miss Squeers was as good as her word; and poor Nicholas, in addition to bad food, dirty lodging, and the being compelled to witness one dull unvarying round of squalid misery, was treated with every special indignity that malice could suggest, or the most grasping cupidity put upon him.

Nor was this all. There was another and deeper system of annoyance which made his heart sink, and nearly drove him wild, by its injustice and cruelty.

The wretched creature, Smike, since the night Nicholas had spoken kindly to him in the schoolroom, had followed him to and fro, with an ever-restless desire to serve or help him; anticipating such little wants as his humble ability could supply, and content only to be near him. He would sit beside him for hours, looking patiently into his face; and a word would brighten up his careworn visage, and call into it a passing gleam even of happiness. He was an altered being; he had an object now; and that object was to show his attachment to the only person—that person a stranger—who had treated him, not to say with kindness, but like a human creature.

Upon this poor being all the spleen and ill-humour that could not be vented on Nicholas were unceasingly bestowed. Drudgery would have been nothing—Smike was well used to that. Buffetings inflicted without cause would have been equally a matter of course; for to them also he had served a long and weary apprenticeship; but it was no sooner observed that he had become attached to Nicholas than stripes and blows, stripes and blows, morning, noon, and night, were his only portion. Squeers was jealous of the influence which his man had so soon acquired, and his family hated him, and Smike paid for both. Nicholas saw it, and ground his teeth at every repetition of the savage and cowardly attack.

He had arranged a few regular lessons for the boys; and one night, as he paced up and down the dismal schoolroom, his swollen heart almost bursting to think that his protection and countenance should have increased the misery of the wretched being whose peculiar destitution had awakened his pity, he paused mechanically in a dark corner where sat the object of his thoughts.

The poor soul was poring hard over a tattered book, with the traces of recent tears still upon his face; vainly endeavouring to master some task which a child of nine years old, possessed of ordinary powers, could have conquered with ease, but which, to the addled brain of the crushed boy of nineteen, was a sealed and hopeless mystery. Yet there he sat, patiently conning the page again and again, stimulated by no boyish ambition, for he was the common jest and scoff even of the uncouth objects that congregated about him, but inspired by the one eager desire to please his solitary friend.

Nicholas laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"I can't do it," said the dejected creature, looking up with bitter disappointment in every feature. "No, no."

"Do not try," replied Nicholas.

The boy shook his head, and, closing the book with a sigh, looked vacantly round, and laid his head upon his arm. He was weeping.

"Do not, for God's sake!" said Nicholas in an agitated voice: "I cannot bear to see you."

"They are more hard with me than ever," sobbed the boy.

"I know it," rejoined Nicholas. "They are."

"But for you," said the outcast, "I should die. They would kill me; they would: I know they would."

"You will do better, poor fellow," replied Nicholas, shaking his head mournfully, "when I am gone."

"Gone!" cried the other, looking intently in his face.

"Softly!" rejoined Nicholas. "Yes."

"Are you going?" demanded the boy in an earnest whisper.

"I cannot say," replied Nicholas. "I was speaking more to my own thoughts than to you."

"Tell me," said the boy imploringly, "oh! do tell me, *will* you go—*will* you?"

"I shall be driven to that at last!" said Nicholas. "The world is before me, after all."

"Tell me," urged Smike, "is the world as bad and dismal as this place?"

"Heaven forbid!" replied Nicholas, pursuing the train of his own thoughts; "its hardest, coarsest toil were happiness to this."

"Should I ever meet you there?" demanded the boy, speaking with unusual wildness and volubility.

"Yes," replied Nicholas, willing to soothe him.

"No, no!" said the other, clasping him by the hand. "Should I—should I—tell me that again. Say I should be sure to find you."

"You would," replied Nicholas with the same humane intention, "and I would help and aid you, and not bring fresh sorrow on you as I have done here."

The boy caught both the young man's hands passionately in his, and, hugging them to his breast, uttered a few broken sounds which were unintelligible. Squeers entered at the moment, and he shrunk back into his old corner.

CHAPTER XIII.

NICHOLAS VARIES THE MONOTONY OF DOTHEBOYS HALL BY A MOST VIGOROUS AND REMARKABLE PROCEEDING, WHICH LEADS TO CONSEQUENCES OF SOME IMPORTANCE.

THE cold, feeble dawn of a January morning was stealing in at the windows of the common sleeping-room, when Nicholas, raising himself on his arm, looked among the prostrate forms which on every side surrounded him, as though in search of some particular object.

It needed a quick eye to detect, from among the huddled mass of sleepers, the form of any given individual. As they lay closely packed together, covered, for warmth's sake, with their patched and ragged clothes, little could be distinguished but the sharp outlines of pale faces, over which the sombre light shed the same dull heavy colour; with, here and there, a gaunt arm thrust forth: its thinness hidden by no covering, but fully exposed to view in all its shrunken ugliness. There were some who, lying on their backs with upturned faces and clenched hands, just visible in the leaden light, bore more the aspect of dead bodies than of living creatures; and there were others coiled up into strange and fantastic postures, such as might have been taken for the uneasy efforts of pain to gain some temporary relief, rather than the freaks of slumber. A few—and these were among the youngest of the children—slept peacefully on, with smiles upon their faces, dreaming, perhaps, of home; but ever and again a deep and heavy sigh, breaking the stillness of the room, announced that some new sleeper had awakened to the misery of another day; and, as morning took the place of night, the smiles gradually faded away with the friendly darkness which had given them birth.

Dreams are the bright creatures of poem and legend, who sport on earth in the night season, and melt away in the first beam of the sun, which lights grim care and stern reality on their daily pilgrimage through the world.

Nicholas looked upon the sleepers; at first, with the air of one who gazes upon a scene which, though familiar to him, has lost none of its sorrowful effect in consequence; and, afterwards, with a more intense and searching scrutiny, as a man would who missed something his eye was accustomed to meet, and had expected to rest upon. He was still occupied in this search, and had half risen from his bed in the eagerness of his quest, when the voice of Squeers was heard calling from the bottom of the stairs.

"Now then," cried that gentleman, "are you going to sleep all day up there——"

"You lazy hounds?" added Mrs. Squeers, finishing the sentence, and producing, at the same time, a sharp sound, like that which is occasioned by the lacing of stays.

"We shall be down directly, sir," replied Nicholas.

"Down directly!" said Squeers. "Ah! you had better be down directly, or I'll be down upon some of you in less. Where's that Smike?"

Nicholas looked hurriedly round again, but made no answer.

"Smike!" shouted Squeers.

"Do you want your head broke in a fresh place, Smike?" demanded his amiable lady in the same key.

Still there was no reply, and still Nicholas stared about him, as did the greater part of the boys, who were by this time roused.

"Confound his impudence!" muttered Squeers, rapping the stair-rail impatiently with his cane. "Nickleby!"

"Well, sir!"

"Send that obstinate scoundrel down; don't you hear me calling?"

"He is not here, sir," replied Nicholas.

"Don't tell me a lie," retorted the schoolmaster. "He is."

"He is not," retorted Nicholas angrily; "don't tell me one."

"We shall soon see that," said Mr. Squeers, rushing up-stairs. "I'll find him, I warrant you."

With which assurance Mr. Squeers bounced into the dormitory, and, swinging his cane in the air ready for a blow, darted into the corner where the lean body of the drudge was usually stretched at night. The cane descended harm-

lessly upon the ground. There was nobody there.

"What does this mean?" said Squeers, turning round with a very pale face. "Where have you hid him?"

"I have seen nothing of him since last night," replied Nicholas.

"Come," said Squeers, evidently frightened, though he endeavoured to look otherwise, "you won't save him this way. Where is he?"

"At the bottom of the nearest pond for aught I know," rejoined Nicholas in a low voice, and fixing his eyes full on the master's face.

"D—n you, what do you mean by that?" retorted Squeers in great perturbation. Without waiting for a reply, he inquired of the boys whether any one among them knew anything of their missing schoolmate.

There was a general hum of anxious denial, in the midst of which one shrill voice was heard to say (as, indeed, everybody thought):

"Please, sir, I think Smike's run away, sir."

"Ha!" cried Squeers, turning sharp round. "Who said that?"

"Tomkins, please, sir," rejoined a chorus of voices. Mr. Squeers made a plunge into the crowd, and at one dive caught a very little boy, habited still in his night-gear, and the perplexed expression of whose countenance, as he was brought forward, seemed to intimate that he was as yet uncertain whether he was about to be punished or rewarded for the suggestion. He was not long in doubt.

"You think he has run away, do you, sir?" demanded Squeers.

"Yes, please, sir," replied the little boy.

"And what, sir," said Squeers, catching the little boy suddenly by the arms, and whisking up his drapery in a most dexterous manner, "what reason have you to suppose that any boy would want to run away from this establishment? Eh, sir?"

The child raised a dismal cry by way of answer, and Mr. Squeers, throwing himself into the most favourable attitude for exercising his strength, beat him until the little urchin in his writhings actually rolled out of his hands, when he mercifully allowed him to roll away as he best could.

"There!" said Squeers. "Now, if any other boy thinks Smike has run away, I shall be glad to have a talk with him."

There was, of course, a profound silence, during which Nicholas showed his disgust as plainly as looks could show it.

"Well, Nickleby!" said Squeers, eyeing him maliciously. "*You* think he has run away, I suppose?"

"I think it extremely likely," replied Nicholas in a quiet manner.

"Oh! you do, do you?" sneered Squeers. "Maybe you know he has?"

"I know nothing of the kind."

"He didn't tell you he was going, I suppose, did he?" sneered Squeers.

"He did not," replied Nicholas; "I am very glad he did not, for it would then have been my duty to have warned you in time."

"Which no doubt you would have been devilish sorry to do," said Squeers in a taunting fashion.

"I should indeed," replied Nicholas. "You interpret my feelings with great accuracy."

Mrs. Squeers had listened to this conversation from the bottom of the stairs; but, now losing all patience, she hastily assumed her night-jacket, and made her way to the scene of action.

"What's all this here to-do?" said the lady as the boys fell off right and left, to save her the trouble of clearing a passage with her brawny arms. "What on earth are you a talking to him for, Squeery?"

"Why, my dear," said Squeers, "the fact is that Smike is not to be found."

"Well, I know that," said the lady; "and where's the wonder? If you get a parcel of proud-stomached teachers, that set the young dogs a rebelling, what else can you look for? Now, young man, you just have the kindness to take yourself off to the schoolroom, and take the boys off with you, and don't you stir out of there till you have leave given you, or you and I may fall out in a way that'll spoil your beauty, handsome as you think yourself, and so I tell you."

"Indeed!" said Nicholas.

"Yes; and indeed and indeed again, Mister Jackanapes," said the excited lady: "and I wouldn't keep such as you in the house another hour, if I had my way."

"Nor would you if I had mine," replied Nicholas. "Now, boys!"

"Ah! Now, boys!" said Mrs. Squeers, mimicking, as nearly as she could, the voice and manner of the usher. "Follow your leader, boys, and take pattern by Smike if you dare. See what he'll get for himself when he is brought back; and, mind! I tell you that you shall have as bad, and twice as bad, if you so much as open your mouths about him."

"If I catch him," said Squeers, "I'll only stop short of flaying him alive. I give you notice, boys."

"*If* you catch him!" retorted Mrs. Squeers contemptuously. "You are sure to; you can't help it, if you go the right way to work. Come! Away with you!"

With these words Mrs. Squeers dismissed the boys, and after a little light skirmishing with those in the rear who were pressing forward to get out of the way, but were detained for a few moments by the throng in front, succeeded in clearing the room, when she confronted her spouse alone.

"He is off," said Mrs. Squeers. "The cow-house and stable are locked up, so he can't be there; and he's not down-stairs anywhere, for the girl has looked. He must have gone York way, and by a public road too."

"Why must he?" inquired Squeers.

"Stupid!" said Mrs. Squeers angrily. "He hadn't any money, had he?"

"Never had a penny of his own in his whole life, that I know of," replied Squeers.

"To be sure," rejoined Mrs. Squeers, "and he didn't take anything to eat with him; that I'll answer for. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Squeers.

"Then, of course," said Mrs. S., "he must beg his way, and he could do that nowhere but on the public road."

"That's true!" exclaimed Squeers, clapping his hands.

"True! Yes; but you would never have thought of it, for all that, if I hadn't said so," replied his wife. "Now, if you take the chaise and go one road, and I borrow Swallow's chaise, and go the other, what with keeping our eyes open, and asking questions, one or other of us is pretty certain to lay hold of him."

The worthy lady's plan was adopted and put in execution without a moment's delay. After a very hasty breakfast, and the prosecution of some inquiries in the village, the result of which seemed to show that he was on the right track, Squeers started forth in the pony-chaise, intent upon discovery and vengeance. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Squeers, arrayed in the white top-coat, and tied up in various shawls and handkerchiefs, issued forth in another chaise and another direction, taking with her a good-sized bludgeon, several odd pieces of strong cord, and a stout labouring man: all provided and carried upon the expedition with the sole object of assisting in the capture, and (once caught) insuring the safe custody of the unfortunate Smike.

Nicholas remained behind in a tumult of feeling, sensible that, whatever might be the upshot of the boy's flight, nothing but painful and deplorable consequences were likely to ensue from it. Death, from want and exposure to the weather, was the best that could be expected from the protracted wandering of so poor and helpless a creature, alone and unfriended, through a country of which he was wholly ignorant. There was little, perhaps, to choose between this fate, and a return to the tender mercies of the Yorkshire school; but the unhappy being had established a hold upon his sympathy and compassion, which made his heart ache at the prospect of the suffering he was destined to undergo. He lingered on in restless anxiety, picturing a thousand possibilities, until the evening of next day, when Squeers returned, alone and unsuccessful.

"No news of the scamp!" said the schoolmaster, who had evidently been stretching his legs, on the old principle, not a few times during the journey. "I'll have consolation for this out of somebody, Nickleby, if Mrs. Squeers don't hunt him down; so I give you warning."

"It is not in my power to console you, sir," said Nicholas. "It is nothing to me."

"Isn't it?" said Squeers in a threatening manner. "We shall see!"

"We shall," rejoined Nicholas.

"Here's the pony run right off his legs, and me obliged to come home with a hack cob, that'll cost fifteen shillings, besides other expenses," said Squeers. "Who's to pay for that, do you hear?"

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

"I'll have it out of somebody, I tell you," said Squeers, his usual harsh crafty manner changed to open bullying. "None of your whining vapourings here, Mr. Puppy, but be off to your kennel, for it's past your bedtime! Come! Get out!"

Nicholas bit his lip and knit his hands involuntarily, for his finger-ends tingled to avenge the insult; but remembering that the man was drunk, and that it could come to little but a noisy brawl, he contented himself with darting a contemptuous look at the tyrant, and walked, as majestically as he could, up-stairs; not a little nettled, however, to observe that Miss Squeers and Master Squeers, and the servant-girl, were enjoying the scene from a snug corner; the two former indulging in many edifying remarks about the presumption of poor upstarts, which occasioned a vast deal of laughter, in which even the most miserable of all miserable servant-girls joined: while Nicholas, stung to the quick, drew over his head such bedclothes as he had, and sternly resolved that the outstanding ac-

count between himself and Mr. Squeers should be settled rather more speedily than the latter anticipated.

Another day came, and Nicholas was scarcely awake when he heard the wheels of a chaise approaching the house. It stopped. The voice of Mrs. Squeers was heard, and in exultation, ordering a glass of spirits for somebody, which was in itself a sufficient sign that something extraordinary had happened. Nicholas hardly dared to look out of the window; but he did so, and the very first object that met his eyes was the wretched Smike: so bedabbled with mud and rain, so haggard, and worn, and wild, that but for his garments being such as no scarecrow was ever seen to wear, he might have been doubtful, even then, of his identity.

"Lift him out," said Squeers, after he had literally feasted his eyes, in silence, upon the culprit. "Bring him in; bring him in!"

"Take care," cried Mrs. Squeers, as her husband proffered his assistance. "We tied his legs under the apron, and made 'em fast to the chaise, to prevent his giving us the slip again."

With hands trembling with delight, Squeers unloosened the cord: and Smike, to all appearance more dead than alive, was brought into the house, and securely locked up in a cellar until such time as Mr. Squeers should deem it expedient to operate upon him, in presence of the assembled school.

Upon a hasty consideration of the circumstances, it may be matter of surprise to some persons that Mr. and Mrs. Squeers should have taken so much trouble to repossess themselves of an encumbrance of which it was their wont to complain so loudly; but their surprise will cease when they are informed that the manifold services of the drudge, if performed by anybody else, would have cost the establishment some ten or twelve shillings per week in the shape of wages; and furthermore, that all runaways were, as a matter of policy, made severe examples of at Dotheboys Hall, inasmuch as, in consequence of the limited extent of its attractions, there was but little inducement, beyond the powerful impulse of fear, for any pupil, provided with the usual number of legs and the power of using them, to remain.

The news that Smike had been caught, and brought back in triumph, ran like wild-fire through the hungry community, and expectation was on tiptoe all the morning. On tiptoe it was destined to remain, however, until afternoon; when Squeers, having refreshed himself with his dinner, and further strengthened himself by an extra libation or so, made his appearance (accompanied by his amiable partner) with a countenance of portentous import, and a fearful instrument of flagellation, strong, supple, waxended, and new—in short, purchased that morning, expressly for the occasion.

"Is every boy here?" asked Squeers in a tremendous voice.

Every boy was there, but every boy was afraid to speak; so Squeers glared along the lines to assure himself; and every eye drooped, and every head cowered down, as he did so.

"Each boy keep his place," said Squeers, administering his favourite blow to the desk, and regarding with gloomy satisfaction the universal start which it never failed to occasion. "Nickleby! to your desk, sir."

It was remarked, by more than one small observer, that there was a very curious and unusual expression in the usher's face; but he took his seat without opening his lips in reply. Squeers, casting a triumphant glance at his assistant, and a look of most comprehensive despotism on the boys, left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, dragging Smike by the collar—or rather, by that fragment of his jacket which was nearest the place where his collar would have been, had he boasted such a decoration.

In any other place the appearance of the wretched, jaded, spiritless object would have occasioned a murmur of compassion and remonstrance. It had some effect even there; for the lookers-on moved uneasily in their seats; and a few of the boldest ventured to steal looks at each other, expressive of indignation and pity.

They were lost on Squeers, however, whose gaze was fastened on the luckless Smike, as he inquired, according to custom in such cases, whether he had anything to say for himself.

"Nothing, I suppose?" said Squeers with a diabolical grin.

Smike glanced round, and his eye rested, for an instant, on Nicholas, as if he had expected him to intercede; but his look was riveted on his desk.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded Squeers again: giving his right arm two or three flourishes to try its power and suppleness. "Stand a little out of the way, Mrs. Squeers, my dear; I've hardly got room enough."

"Spare me, sir!" cried Smike.

"Oh! that's all, is it?" said Squeers. "Yes, I'll flog you within an inch of your life, and spare you that."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Squeers, "that's a good 'un!"

"I was driven to do it," said Smike faintly; and casting another imploring look about him.

"Driven to do it, were you?" said Squeers. "Oh! it wasn't your fault; it was mine, I suppose—eh?"

"A nasty, ungrateful, pig-headed, brutish, obstinate, sneaking dog!" exclaimed Mrs. Squeers, taking Smike's head under her arm, and administering a cuff at every epithet; "what does he mean by that?"

"Stand aside, my dear," replied Squeers. "We'll try and find out."

Mrs. Squeers, being out of breath with her exertions, complied. Squeers caught the boy firmly in his grip; one desperate cut had fallen on his body—he was wincing from the lash, and uttering a scream of pain—it was raised again, and again about to fall—when Nicholas Nickleby, suddenly starting up, cried "Stop!" in a voice that made the rafters ring.

"Who cried stop?" said Squeers, turning savagely round.

"I," said Nicholas, stepping forward. "This must not go on."

"Must not go on!" cried Squeers almost in a shriek.

"No!" thundered Nicholas.

Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that were positively frightful.

"I say must not," repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; "shall not! I will prevent it."

Squeers continued to gaze upon him with his eyes starting out of his head; but astonishment had actually, for the moment, bereft him of speech.

"You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf," said Nicholas; "you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged forgiveness for him, and offered to be responsible that he would remain quietly here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon yourself; not I."

"Sit down, beggar!" screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and seizing Smike as he spoke.

"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for, by Heaven, I will not spare you if you drive me on!"

"Stand back!" cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion; "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care, for, if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!"

He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

The boys—with the exception of Master Squeers, who, coming to his father's assistance, harassed the enemy in the rear—moved not, hand or foot; but Mrs. Squeers, with many shrieks for aid, hung on to the tail of her partner's coat, and endeavoured to drag him from his infuriated adversary; while Miss Squeers, who had been peeping through the keyhole in expectation of a very different scene, darted in at the very beginning of the attack, and, after launching a shower of inkstands at the usher's head, beat Nicholas to her heart's content; animating herself, at every blow, with the recollection of his having refused her proffered love, and thus imparting an additional strength to an arm which (as she took after her mother in this respect) was, at no time, one of the weakest.

Nicholas, in the full torrent of his violence, felt the blows no more than if they had been dealt with feathers; but, becoming tired of the noise and uproar, and feeling that his arm grew weak besides, he threw all his remaining strength into half-a-dozen finishing cuts, and flung Squeers from him with all the force he could muster. The violence of his fall precipitated Mrs. Squeers completely over an adjacent form; and Squeers, striking his head against it in his descent, lay at his full length on the ground, stunned and motionless.

Having brought affairs to this happy termination, and ascertained, to his thorough satisfaction, that Squeers was only stunned, and not dead (upon which point he had had some unpleasant doubts at first), Nicholas left his family to restore him, and retired to consider what course he had better adopt. He looked anxiously round for Smike as he left the room, but he was nowhere to be seen.

After a brief consideration, he packed up a few clothes in a small leathern valise, and, finding that nobody offered to oppose his progress, marched boldly out by the front-door, and shortly afterwards struck into the road which led to Greta Bridge.

When he had cooled sufficiently to be enabled to give his present circumstances some little reflection, they did not appear in a very encouraging light; he had only four shillings and a few pence in his pocket, and was something more than two hundred and fifty miles from London, whither he resolved to direct his steps, that he might ascertain, among other things, what account of the morning's proceedings Mr. Squeers transmitted to his most affectionate uncle.

Lifting up his eyes as he arrived at the conclusion that there was no remedy for this unfortunate state of things, he beheld a horseman coming towards him, whom, on nearer approach, he discovered, to his infinite chagrin, to be no other than Mr. John Browdie, who, clad in cords and leather leggings, was urging his animal forward by means of a thick ash stick, which seemed to have been recently cut from some stout sapling.

"I am in no mood for more noise and riot," thought Nicholas, "and yet, do what I will, I shall have an altercation with this honest blockhead, and perhaps a blow or two from yonder staff."

In truth, there appeared some reason to expect that such a result would follow from the encounter, for John Browdie no sooner saw Nicholas advancing than he reined in his horse by the footpath, and waited until such time as he should come up; looking, meanwhile, very sternly between the horse's ears, at Nicholas as he came on at his leisure.

"Servant, young genelman," said John.

"Yours," said Nicholas.

"Weel; we ha' met at last," observed John, making the stirrup ring under a smart touch of the ash stick.

"Yes," replied Nicholas, hesitating. "Come!" he said frankly after a moment's pause, "we parted on no very good terms the last time we met; it was my fault, I believe; but I had no intention of offending you, and no idea that I was doing so. I was very sorry for it afterwards. Will you shake hands?"

"Shake honds!" cried the good-humoured Yorkshireman; "ah! that I weel;" at the same time he bent down from the saddle, and gave Nicholas's fist a huge wrench. "But wa'at be the matther wi' thy feace, mun? it be all brokken loike."

"It is a cut," said Nicholas, turning scarlet as he spoke,—"a blow; but I returned it to the giver, and with good interest too."

"Noa, did 'ee, though?" exclaimed John Browdie. "Well deane! I loike 'un for thot."

"The fact is," said Nicholas, not very well knowing how to make the avowal, "the fact is that I have been ill treated."

"Noa!" interposed John Browdie in a tone of compassion; for he was a giant in strength and stature, and Nicholas very likely, in his eyes, seemed a mere dwarf; "dean't say thot."

"Yes, I have," replied Nicholas, "by that man Squeers, and I have beaten him soundly, and am leaving this place in consequence."

"What!" cried John Browdie with such an ecstatic shout, that the horse quite shied at it. "Beatten the schoolmeasther! Ho! ho! ho! Beatten the schoolmeasther! Who ever heard o' the loike o' that, noo? Giv' us thee hond agean, yoongster. Beatten the schoolmeasther! Dang it, I loov' thee for 't."

With these expressions of delight, John Browdie laughed and laughed again—so loud that the echoes, far and wide, sent back nothing but jovial peals of merriment — and shook Nicholas by the hand, meanwhile, no less heartily. When his mirth had subsided, he inquired what Nicholas meant to do; on his informing him, to go straight to London, he shook his head doubtfully, and inquired if he knew how much the coaches charged to carry passengers so far.

"No, I do not," said Nicholas; "but it is of no great consequence to me, for I intend walking."

"Gang awa' to Lunnun afoot!" cried John in amazement.

"Every step of the way," replied Nicholas. "I should be many steps further on by this time, and so good-bye!"

"Nay, noo," replied the honest countryman, reining in his impatient horse, "stan' still, tell 'ee. Hoo much cash hast thee gotten?"

"Not much," said Nicholas, colouring, "but I can make it enough. Where there's a will there's a way, you know."

John Browdie made no verbal answer to this remark, but, putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out an old purse of solid leather, and insisted that Nicholas should borrow from him whatever he required for his present necessities.

"Dean't be afeard, mun," he said; "tak' eneaf to carry thee whoam. Thee'lt pay me yan day, a' warrant."

Nicholas could by no means be prevailed

upon to borrow more than a sovereign, with which loan Mr. Browdie, after many entreaties that he would accept of more (observing, with a touch of Yorkshire caution, that, if he didn't spend it all, he could put the surplus by till he had an opportunity of remitting it carriage free), was fain to content himself.

"Tak' that bit o' timber to help thee on wi', mun," he added, pressing his stick on Nicholas, and giving his hand another squeeze; "keep a good heart, and bless thee. Beatten the schoolmeasther! 'Cod, it's the best thing a've heerd this twonty year!"

So saying, and indulging, with more delicacy than might have been expected from him, in another series of loud laughs, for the purpose of avoiding the thanks which Nicholas poured forth, John Browdie set spurs to his horse, and went off at a smart canter: looking back, from time to time, as Nicholas stood gazing after him, and waving his hand cheerily, as if to encourage him on his way. Nicholas watched

"WRETCH," REJOINED NICHOLAS FIERCELY, "TOUCH HIM AT YOUR PERIL! I WILL NOT STAND BY, AND SEE IT DONE. MY BLOOD IS UP, AND I HAVE THE STRENGTH OF TEN SUCH MEN AS YOU."

the horse and rider until they disappeared over the brow of a distant hill, and then set forward on his journey.

He did not travel far that afternoon, for by this time it was nearly dark, and there had been a heavy fall of snow, which not only rendered the way toilsome, but the track uncertain and difficult to find after daylight, save by experienced wayfarers. He lay, that night, at a cottage, where beds were let at a cheap rate to the more humble class of travellers; and, rising betimes next morning, made his way before night to Boroughbridge. Passing through that town in search of some cheap resting-place, he stumbled upon an empty barn within a couple of hundred yards of the roadside; in a warm corner of which he stretched his weary limbs, and soon fell asleep.

When he awoke next morning, and tried to recollect his dreams, which had been all connected with his recent sojourn at Dotheboys Hall, he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stared—not with the most composed countenance possible—at some motionless object which seemed to be stationed within a few yards in front of him.

"Strange!" cried Nicholas. "Can this be some lingering creation of the visions that have

scarcely left me? It cannot be real—and yet I—I am awake! Smike!"

The form moved, rose, advanced, and dropped upon its knees at his feet. It was Smike indeed.

"Why do you kneel to me?" said Nicholas, hastily raising him.

"To go with you—anywhere—everywhere—to the world's end—to the churchyard grave," replied Smike, clinging to his hand. "Let me, oh, do let me! You are my home—my kind friend—take me with you, pray."

"I am a friend who can do little for you," said Nicholas kindly. "How came you here?"

He had followed him, it seemed; had never lost sight of him all the way; had watched while he slept, and when he halted for refreshment; and had feared to appear before, lest he should be sent back. He had not intended to appear now, but Nicholas had awakened more suddenly than he looked for, and he had had no time to conceal himself.

"Poor fellow!" said Nicholas, "your hard fate denies you any friend but one, and he is nearly as poor and helpless as yourself."

"May I—may I go with you?" asked Smike timidly. "I will be your faithful, hard-working servant, I will indeed. I want no clothes," added the poor creature, drawing his rags together; "these will do very well. I only want to be near you."

"And you shall," cried Nicholas. "And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better. Come!"

With these words he strapped his burden on his shoulders, and, taking his stick in one hand, extended the other to his delighted charge; and so they passed out of the old barn together.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAVING THE MISFORTUNE TO TREAT OF NONE BUT COMMON PEOPLE, IS NECESSARILY OF A MEAN AND VULGAR CHARACTER.

IN that quarter of London in which Golden Square is situated there is a bygone, faded, tumble-down street, with two irregular rows of tall meagre houses, which seem to have stared each other out of countenance years ago. The very chimneys appear to have grown dismal and melancholy, from having had nothing better to look at than the chimneys over the way. Their tops are battered, and broken, and blackened with smoke; and, here and there, some taller stack than the rest, inclining heavily to one side, and toppling over the roof, seems to meditate taking revenge for half a century's neglect by crushing the inhabitants of the garrets beneath.

The fowls who peck about the kennels, jerking their bodies hither and thither with a gait which none but town fowls are ever seen to adopt, and which any country cock or hen would be puzzled to understand, are perfectly in keeping with the crazy habitations of their owners. Dingy, ill-plumed, drowsy flutterers, sent, like many of the neighbouring children, to get a livelihood in the streets, they hop from stone to stone in forlorn search of some hidden eatable in the mud, and can scarcely raise a crow among them. The only one with anything approaching to a voice is an aged bantam at the baker's; and even he is hoarse, in consequence of bad living in his last place.

To judge from the size of the houses, they have been, at one time, tenanted by persons of better condition than their present occupants; but they are now let off, by the week, in floors or rooms, and every door has almost as many plates or bell-handles as there are apartments within. The windows are, for the same reason, sufficiently diversified in appearance, being ornamented with every variety of common blind and curtain that can easily be imagined; while every doorway is blocked up, and rendered nearly impassable, by a motley collection of children and porter pots of all sizes, from the baby in arms and the half-pint pot to the full-grown girl and half-gallon can.

In the parlour of one of these houses, which was perhaps a thought dirtier than any of its neighbours; which exhibited more bell-handles, children, and porter pots, and caught in all its freshness the first gust of the thick black smoke that poured forth, night and day, from a large brewery hard by; hung a bill, announcing that there was yet one room to let within its walls, though on what story the vacant room could be—regard being had to the outward tokens of many lodgers which the whole front displayed, from the mangle in the kitchen window to the flower-pots on the parapet—it would have been beyond the power of a calculating boy to discover.

The common stairs of this mansion were bare and carpetless; but a curious visitor, who had to climb his way to the top, might have observed that there were not wanting indications of the progressive poverty of the inmates, although their rooms were shut. Thus, the first-floor

lodgers, being flush of furniture, kept an old mahogany table—real mahogany—on the landing-place outside, which was only taken in when occasion required. On the second story the spare furniture dwindled down to a couple of old deal chairs, of which one, belonging to the back-room, was shorn of a leg, and bottomless. The story above boasted no greater excess than a worm-eaten wash-tub; and the garret landing-place displayed no costlier articles than two crippled pitchers and some broken blacking-bottles.

It was on this garret landing-place that a hard-featured, square-faced man, elderly and shabby, stopped to unlock the door of the front attic, into which, having surmounted the task of turning the rusty key in its still more rusty wards, he walked with the air of legal owner.

This person wore a wig of short, coarse, red hair, which he took off with his hat, and hung upon a nail. Having adopted in its place a dirty cotton nightcap, and groped about in the dark till he found a remnant of candle, he knocked at the partition which divided the two garrets, and inquired, in a loud voice, whether Mr. Noggs had a light.

The sounds that came back were stifled by the lath and plaster, and it seemed, moreover, as though the speaker had uttered them from the interior of a mug or other drinking vessel; but they were in the voice of Newman, and conveyed a reply in the affirmative.

"A nasty night, Mr. Noggs!" said the man in the nightcap, stepping in to light his candle.

"Does it rain?" asked Newman.

"Does it?" replied the other pettishly. "I am wet through."

"It doesn't take much to wet you and me through, Mr. Crowl," said Newman, laying his hand upon the lappel of his threadbare coat.

"Well; and that makes it the more vexatious," observed Mr. Crowl in the same pettish tone.

Uttering a low querulous growl, the speaker, whose harsh countenance was the very epitome of selfishness, raked the scanty fire nearly out of the grate, and, emptying the glass which Noggs had pushed towards him, inquired where he kept his coals.

Newman Noggs pointed to the bottom of a cupboard, and Mr. Crowl, seizing the shovel, threw on half the stock: which Noggs very deliberately took off again, without saying a word.

"You have not turned saving at this time of day, I hope?" said Crowl.

Newman pointed to the empty glass, as though it were a sufficient refutation of the charge, and briefly said that he was going downstairs to supper.

"To the Kenwigses?" asked Crowl.

Newman nodded assent.

"Think of that, now!" said Crowl. "If I didn't—thinking that you were certain not to go, because you said you wouldn't—tell Kenwigs I couldn't come, and make up my mind to spend the evening with you!"

"I was obliged to go," said Newman. "They would have me."

"Well; but what's to become of me?" urged the selfish man, who never thought of anybody else. "It's all your fault. I'll tell you what—I'll sit by your fire till you come back again."

Newman cast a despairing glance at his small store of fuel, but, not having the courage to say no—a word which in all his life he never had said at the right time, either to himself or any one else—gave way to the proposed arrangement. Mr. Crowl immediately went about making himself as comfortable, with Newman Noggs's means, as circumstances would admit of his being made.

The lodgers to whom Crowl had made allusion, under the designation of "the Kenwigses," were the wife and olive-branches of one Mr. Kenwigs, a turner in ivory, who was looked upon as a person of some consideration on the premises, inasmuch as he occupied the whole of the first floor, comprising a suite of two rooms. Mrs. Kenwigs, too, was quite a lady in her manners, and of a very genteel family, having an uncle who collected a water-rate; besides which distinction, the two eldest of her little girls went twice a week to a dancing school in the neighbourhood, and had flaxen hair, tied with blue ribbons, hanging in luxuriant pigtails down their backs; and wore little white trousers with frills round the ankles—for all of which reasons, and many more equally valid, but too numerous to mention, Mrs. Kenwigs was considered a very desirable person to know, and was the constant theme of all the gossips in the street, and even three or four doors round the corner at both ends.

It was the anniversary of that happy day on which the Church of England, as by law established, had bestowed Mrs. Kenwigs upon Mr. Kenwigs; and, in grateful commemoration of the same, Mrs. Kenwigs had invited a few select friends to cards and a supper in the first floor, and had put on a new gown to receive them in: which gown, being of a flaming colour and made upon a juvenile principle, was so successful that Mr. Kenwigs said the eight years of matrimony

and the five children seemed all a dream, and Mrs. Kenwigs younger and more blooming than on the very first Sunday he had kept company with her.

Beautiful as Mrs. Kenwigs looked when she was dressed, though, and so stately that you would have supposed she had a cook and housemaid at least, and nothing to do but order them about, she had a world of trouble with the preparations; more, indeed, than she, being of a delicate and genteel constitution, could have sustained, had not the pride of housewifery upheld her. At last, however, all the things that had to be got together were got together, and all the things that had to be got out of the way were got out of the way, and everything was ready, and the collector himself having promised to come, fortune smiled upon the occasion.

The party was admirably selected. There were, first of all, Mr. Kenwigs and Mrs. Kenwigs, and four olive Kenwigses who sat up to supper; firstly, because it was but right that they should have a treat on such a day; and secondly, because their going to bed, in presence of the company, would have been inconvenient, not to say improper. Then, there was a young lady who had made Mrs. Kenwigs's dress, and who —it was the most convenient thing in the world —living in the two-pair back, gave up her bed to the baby, and got a little girl to watch it. Then, to match this young lady, was a young man, who had known Mr. Kenwigs when he was a bachelor, and was much esteemed by the ladies, as bearing the reputation of a rake. To these were added a newly-married couple, who had visited Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs in their courtship; and a sister of Mrs. Kenwigs's, who was quite a beauty; besides whom, there was another young man, supposed to entertain honourable designs upon the lady last mentioned; and Mr. Noggs, who was a genteel person to ask, because he had been a gentleman once. There were also an elderly lady from the back-parlour, and one more young lady, who, next to the collector, perhaps was the great lion of the party, being the daughter of a theatrical fireman, who "went on" in the pantomime, and had the greatest turn for the stage that was ever known, being able to sing and recite in a manner that brought the tears into Mrs. Kenwigs's eyes. There was only one drawback upon the pleasure of seeing such friends, and that was, that the lady in the back-parlour, who was very fat, and turned of sixty, came in a low book-muslin dress and short kid gloves, which so exasperated Mrs. Kenwigs, that that lady assured her visitors, in private, that if it hadn't happened that the supper was cooking at the back-parlour grate at that moment, she certainly would have requested its representative to withdraw.

"My dear," said Mr. Kenwigs, "wouldn't it be better to begin a round game?"

"Kenwigs, my dear," returned his wife, "I am surprised at you. Would you begin without my uncle?"

"I forgot the collector," said Kenwigs. "Oh no, that would never do!"

"He's so particular," said Mrs. Kenwigs, turning to the other married lady, "that if we began without him, I should be out of his will for ever."

"Dear!" cried the married lady.

"You have no idea what he is," replied Mrs. Kenwigs; "and yet as good a creature as ever breathed."

"The kindest-hearted man as ever was," said Kenwigs.

"It goes to his heart, I believe, to be forced to cut the water off when the people don't pay," observed the bachelor friend, intending a joke.

"George," said Mr. Kenwigs solemnly, "none of that, if you please."

"It was only my joke," said the friend, abashed.

"George," rejoined Mr. Kenwigs, "a joke is a wery good thing—a wery good thing—but, when that joke is made at the expense of Mrs. Kenwigs's feelings, I set my face against it. A man in public life expects to be sneered at—it is the fault of his elewated sitiwation, and not of himself. Mrs. Kenwigs's relation is a public man, and that he knows, George, and that he can bear; but, putting Mrs. Kenwigs out of the question (if I *could* put Mrs. Kenwigs out of the question on such an occasion as this), I have the honour to be connected with the collector by marriage; and I cannot allow these remarks in my——" Mr. Kenwigs was going to say "house," but he rounded the sentence with "apartments."

At the conclusion of these observations, which drew forth evidences of acute feeling from Mrs. Kenwigs, and had the intended effect of impressing the company with a deep sense of the collector's dignity, a ring was heard at the bell.

"That's him," whispered Mr. Kenwigs, greatly excited. "Morleena, my dear, run down and let your uncle in, and kiss him directly you get the door open. Hem! Let's be talking."

Adopting Mr. Kenwigs's suggestion, the company spoke very loudly, to look easy and unembarrassed; and, almost as soon as they had begun to do so, a short old gentleman in

drabs and gaiters, with a face that might have been carved out of *lignum vitæ*, for anything that appeared to the contrary, was led playfully in by Miss Morleena Kenwigs, regarding whose uncommon Christian name it may be here remarked that it had been invented and composed by Mrs. Kenwigs previous to her first lying-in, for the special distinction of her eldest child, in case it should prove a daughter.

"Oh, uncle, I am *so* glad to see you!" said Mrs. Kenwigs, kissing the collector affectionately on both cheeks. "So glad!"

"Many happy returns of the day, my dear," replied the collector, returning the compliment.

Now, this was an interesting thing. Here was a collector of water-rates, without his book, without his pen and ink, without his double knock, without his intimidation, kissing—actually kissing—an agreeable female, and leaving taxes, summonses, notices that he had called, or announcements that he would never call again, for two quarters' due, wholly out of the question. It was pleasant to see how the company looked on, quite absorbed in the sight, and to behold the nods and winks with which they expressed their gratification at finding so much humanity in a tax-gatherer.

"Where will you sit, uncle?" said Mrs. Kenwigs in the full glow of family pride, which the appearance of her distinguished relation occasioned.

"Anywheres, my dear," said the collector; "I am not particular."

Not particular! What a meek collector! If he had been an author, who knew his place, he couldn't have been more humble.

"Mr. Lillyvick," said Kenwigs, addressing the collector, "some friends here, sir, are very anxious for the honour of—thank you—Mr. and Mrs. Cutler, Mr. Lillyvick."

"Proud to know you, sir," said Mr. Cutler; "I've heerd of you very often." These were not mere words of ceremony; for, Mr. Cutler, having kept house in Mr. Lillyvick's parish, had heard of him very often indeed. His attention in calling had been quite extraordinary.

"George you know, I think, Mr. Lillyvick," said Kenwigs; "lady from down-stairs—Mr. Lillyvick. Mr. Snewkes—Mr. Lillyvick. Miss Green—Mr. Lillyvick. Mr. Lillyvick—Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Very glad to make two public characters acquainted! Mrs. Kenwigs, my dear, will you sort the counters?"

Mrs. Kenwigs, with the assistance of Newman Noggs, (who, as he performed sundry little acts of kindness for the children, at all times and seasons, was humoured in his request to be taken no notice of, and was merely spoken about, in a whisper, as the decayed gentleman), did as she was desired; and the greater part of the guests sat down to speculation, while Newman himself, Mrs. Kenwigs, and Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, looked after the supper-table.

While the ladies were thus busying themselves, Mr. Lillyvick was intent upon the game in progress, and, as all should be fish that comes to a water-collector's net, the dear old gentleman was by no means scrupulous in appropriating to himself the property of his neighbours, which, on the contrary, he abstracted whenever an opportunity presented itself, smiling good-humouredly all the while, and making so many condescending speeches to the owners, that they were delighted with his amiability, and thought in their hearts that he deserved to be Chancellor of the Exchequer at least.

After a great deal of trouble, and the administration of many slaps on the head to the infant Kenwigses, whereof two of the most rebellious were summarily banished, the cloth was laid with much elegance, and a pair of boiled fowls, a large piece of pork, apple-pie, potatoes, and greens were served; at sight of which the worthy Mr. Lillyvick vented a great many witticisms, and plucked up amazingly: to the immense delight and satisfaction of the whole body of admirers.

Very well and very fast the supper went off; no more serious difficulties occurring than those which arose from the incessant demand for clean knives and forks: which made poor Mrs. Kenwigs wish, more than once, that private society adopted the principle of schools, and required that every guest should bring his own knife, fork, and spoon; which doubtless would be a great accommodation in many cases, and to no one more so than to the lady and gentleman of the house, especially if the school principle were carried out to the full extent, and the articles were expected, as a matter of delicacy, not to be taken away again.

Everybody having eaten everything, the table was cleared in a most alarming hurry, and with great noise; and the spirits, whereat the eyes of Newman Noggs glistened, being arranged in order, with water both hot and cold, the party composed themselves for conviviality; Mr. Lillyvick being stationed in a large arm-chair by the fireside, and the four little Kenwigses disposed on a small form in front of the company, with their flaxen tails towards them, and their faces to the fire; an arrangement which

was no sooner perfected than Mrs. Kenwigs was overpowered by the feelings of a mother, and fell upon the left shoulder of Mr. Kenwigs dissolved in tears.

"They are so beautiful!" said Mrs. Kenwigs, sobbing.

"Oh dear," said all the ladies, "so they are! It's very natural you should feel proud of that; but don't give way, don't."

"I can—not help it, and it don't signify," sobbed Mrs. Kenwigs. "Oh! they're too beautiful to live, much too beautiful!"

On hearing this alarming presentiment of their being doomed to an early death in the flower of their infancy, all four little girls raised a hideous cry, and, burying their heads in their mother's lap simultaneously, screamed until the eight flaxen tails vibrated again; Mrs. Kenwigs meanwhile clasping them alternately to her bosom, with attitudes expressive of distrac-

"I CAN—NOT HELP IT, AND IT DON'T SIGNIFY," SOBBED MRS. KENWIGS. "OH! THEY'RE TOO BEAUTIFUL TO LIVE, MUCH TOO BEAUTIFUL!"

tion, which Miss Petowker herself might have copied.

At length the anxious mother permitted herself to be soothed into a more tranquil state, and the little Kenwigses, being also composed, were distributed among the company, to prevent the possibility of Mrs. Kenwigs being again overcome by the blaze of their combined beauty. This done, the ladies and gentlemen united in prophesying that they would live for many, many years, and that there was no occasion at all for Mrs. Kenwigs to distress herself: which, in good truth, there did not appear to be; the loveliness of the children by no means justifying her apprehensions.

"This day eight year——" said Mr. Kenwigs after a pause. "Dear me—ah!"

This reflection was echoed by all present, who said "Ah!" first, and "Dear me" afterwards.

"I was younger then," tittered Mrs. Kenwigs.

"No," said the collector.

"Certainly not," added everybody.

"I remember my niece," said Mr. Lillyvick, surveying his audience with a grave air; "I remember her, on that very afternoon, when she first acknowledged to her mother a partiality for Kenwigs. 'Mother,' she says, 'I love him.'"

"'Adore him,' I said, uncle," interposed Mrs. Kenwigs.

"'Love him,' I think, my dear," said the collector firmly.

"Perhaps you are right, uncle," replied Mrs. Kenwigs submissively. "I thought it was 'adore.'"

"'Love,' my dear," retorted Mr. Lillyvick. "'Mother,' she says, 'I love him!' 'What do I hear?' cries her mother; and instantly falls into strong convulsions."

A general exclamation of astonishment burst from the company.

"Into strong convulsions," repeated Mr. Lillyvick, regarding them with a rigid look. "Kenwigs will excuse my saying, in the presence of friends, that there was a very great objection to him, on the ground that he was beneath the family, and would disgrace it. You remember, Kenwigs?"

"Certainly," replied that gentleman, in no way displeased at the reminiscence, inasmuch as it proved, beyond all doubt, what a high family Mrs. Kenwigs came of.

"I shared in that feeling," said Mr. Lillyvick: "perhaps it was natural; perhaps it wasn't."

A gentle murmur seemed to say that, in one of Mr. Lillyvick's station, the objection was not only natural, but highly praiseworthy.

"I came round to him in time," said Mr. Lillyvick. "After they were married, and there was no help for it, I was one of the first to say that Kenwigs must be taken notice of. The family *did* take notice of him in consequence, and on my representation; and I am bound to say—and proud to say—that I have always found him a very honest, well-behaved, upright, respectable sort of man. Kenwigs, shake hands."

"I am proud to do it, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs.

"So am I, Kenwigs," rejoined Mr. Lillyvick.

"A very happy life I have led with your niece, sir," said Kenwigs.

"It would have been your own fault if you had not, sir," remarked Mr. Lillyvick.

"Morleena Kenwigs," cried her mother at this crisis, much affected, "kiss your dear uncle!"

The young lady did as she was requested, and the three other little girls were successively hoisted up to the collector's countenance, and subjected to the same process, which was afterwards repeated on them by the majority of those present.

"Oh dear, Mrs. Kenwigs!" said Miss Petowker, "while Mr. Noggs is making that punch to drink happy returns in, do let Morleena go through that figure dance before Mr. Lillyvick."

"No, no, my dear," replied Mrs. Kenwigs, "it will only worry my uncle."

"It can't worry him, I am sure," said Miss Petowker. "You will be very much pleased, won't you, sir?"

"That I am sure I shall," replied the collector, glancing at the punch-mixer.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what," said Mrs. Kenwigs; "Morleena shall do the steps, if uncle can persuade Miss Petowker to recite us the Blood-Drinker's Burial afterwards."

There was a great clapping of hands and stamping of feet at this proposition; the subject whereof gently inclined her head several times, in acknowledgment of the reception.

"You know," said Miss Petowker reproachfully, "that I dislike doing anything professional in private parties."

"Oh, but not here!" said Mrs. Kenwigs. "We are all so very friendly and pleasant, that you might as well be going through it in your own room; besides, the occasion——"

"I can't resist that," interrupted Miss Petowker; "anything in my humble power I shall be delighted to do."

Mrs. Kenwigs and Miss Petowker had arranged a small *programme* of the entertainments between them, of which this was the prescribed order, but they had settled to have a little pressing on both sides, because it looked more natural. The company being all ready, Miss Petowker hummed a tune, and Morleena danced a dance; having previously had the soles of her shoes chalked with as much care as if she were going on the tight-rope. It was a very beautiful figure, comprising a great deal of work for the arms, and was received with unbounded applause.

"If I was blessed with a—a child"—said Miss Petowker, blushing—"of such genius as that, I would have her out at the Opera instantly."

Mrs. Kenwigs sighed, and looked at Mr. Kenwigs, who shook his head, and observed that he was doubtful about it.

"Kenwigs is afraid," said Mrs. K.

"What of?" inquired Miss Petowker; "not of her failing?"

"Oh no!" replied Mrs. Kenwigs, "but if

she grew up what she is now,—only think of the young dukes and marquises."

"Very right," said the collector.

"Still," submitted Miss Petowker, "if she took a proper pride in herself, you know——"

"There's a good deal in that," observed Mrs. Kenwigs, looking at her husband.

"I only know"—faltered Miss Petowker—"it may be no rule, to be sure—but *I* have never found any inconvenience or unpleasantness of that sort."

Mr. Kenwigs, with becoming gallantry, said that settled the question at once, and that he would take the subject into his serious consideration. This being resolved upon, Miss Petowker was entreated to begin the Blood-Drinker's Burial; to which end that young lady let down her back-hair, and taking up her position at the other end of the room, with the bachelor friend posted in a corner, to rush out at the cue, "in death expire," and catch her in his arms when she died raving mad, went through the performance with extraordinary spirit, and to the great terror of the little Kenwigses, who were all but frightened into fits.

The ecstasies consequent upon the effort had not yet subsided, and Newman (who had not been thoroughly sober at so late an hour for a long long time) had not yet been able to put in a word of announcement that the punch was ready, when a hasty knock was heard at the room-door, which elicited a shriek from Mrs. Kenwigs, who immediately divined that the baby had fallen out of bed.

"Who is that?" demanded Mr. Kenwigs sharply.

"Don't be alarmed, it's only me," said Crowl, looking in in his nightcap. "The baby is very comfortable, for I peeped into the room as I came down, and it's fast asleep, and so is the girl; and I don't think the candle will set fire to the bed-curtain, unless a draught was to get into the room—it's Mr. Noggs that's wanted."

"Me!" cried Newman, much astonished.

"Why, it *is* a queer hour, isn't it?" replied Crowl, who was not best pleased at the prospect of losing his fire; "and they are queer-looking people, too, all covered with rain and mud. Shall I tell them to go away?"

"No," said Newman, rising. "People? How many?"

"Two," rejoined Crowl.

"Want me? By name?" asked Newman.

"By name," replied Crowl. "Mr. Newman Noggs as pat as need be."

Newman reflected for a few seconds, and then hurried away, muttering that he would be back directly. He was as good as his word: for, in an exceedingly short time, he burst into the room, and seizing, without a word of apology or explanation, a lighted candle and tumbler of hot punch from the table, darted away like a madman.

"What the deuce is the matter with him?" exclaimed Crowl, throwing the door open. "Hark! Is there any noise above?"

The guests rose in great confusion, and, looking in each other's faces with much perplexity and some fear, stretched their necks forward, and listened attentively.

CHAPTER XV.

ACQUAINTS THE READER WITH THE CAUSE AND ORIGIN OF THE INTERRUPTION DESCRIBED IN THE LAST CHAPTER, AND WITH SOME OTHER MATTERS NECESSARY TO BE KNOWN.

NEWMAN NOGGS scrambled in violent haste up-stairs with the steaming beverage, which he had so unceremoniously snatched from the table of Mr. Kenwigs, and, indeed, from the very grasp of the water-rate collector, who was eyeing the contents of the tumbler, at the moment of its unexpected abstraction, with lively marks of pleasure visible in his countenance. He bore his prize straight to his own back-garret, where, footsore and nearly shoeless, wet, dirty, jaded, and disfigured with every mark of fatiguing travel, sat Nicholas and Smike, at once the cause and partner of his toil: both perfectly worn out by their unwonted and protracted exertion.

Newman's first act was to compel Nicholas, with gentle force, to swallow half of the punch at a breath, nearly boiling as it was; and his next, to pour the remainder down the throat of Smike, who, never having tasted anything stronger than aperient medicine in his whole life, exhibited various odd manifestations of surprise and delight during the passage of the liquor down his throat, and turned up his eyes most emphatically when it was all gone.

"You are wet through," said Newman, passing his hand hastily over the coat which Nicholas had thrown off; "and I—I—haven't even a change," he added, with a wistful glance at the shabby clothes he wore himself.

"I have dry clothes, or at least such as will serve my turn well, in my bundle," replied

Nicholas. "If you look so distressed to see me, you will add to the pain I feel already at being compelled, for one night, to cast myself upon your slender means for aid and shelter."

Newman did not look the less distressed to hear Nicholas talking in this strain; but, upon his young friend grasping him heartily by the hand, and assuring him that nothing but implicit confidence in the sincerity of his professions, and kindness of feeling towards himself, would have induced him, on any consideration, even to have made him acquainted with his arrival in London, Mr. Noggs brightened up again, and went about making such arrangements as were in his power for the comfort of his visitors with extreme alacrity.

These were simple enough; poor Newman's means halting at a very considerable distance short of his inclinations; but, slight as they were, they were not made without much bustling and running about. As Nicholas had husbanded his scanty stock of money so well that it was not yet quite expended, a supper of bread and cheese, with some cold beef from the cook's shop, was soon placed upon the table; and these viands being flanked by a bottle of spirits and a pot of porter, there was no ground for apprehension on the score of hunger or thirst, at all events. Such preparations as Newman had it in his power to make, for the accommodation of his guests during the night, occupied no very great time in completing; and as he had insisted, as an express preliminary, that Nicholas should change his clothes, and that Smike should invest himself in his solitary coat (which no entreaties would dissuade him from stripping off for the purpose), the travellers partook of their frugal fare with more satisfaction than one of them, at least, had derived from many a better meal.

They then drew near the fire, which Newman Noggs had made up as well as he could after the inroads of Crowl upon the fuel; and Nicholas, who had hitherto been restrained by the extreme anxiety of his friend that he should refresh himself after his journey, now pressed him with earnest questions concerning his mother and sister.

"Well," replied Newman with his accustomed taciturnity; "both well."

"They are living in the City still?" inquired Nicholas.

"They are," said Newman.

"And my sister," added Nicholas. "Is she still engaged in the business which she wrote to tell me she thought she should like so much?"

Newman opened his eyes rather wider than usual, but merely replied by a gasp, which, according to the action of the head that accompanied it, was interpreted by his friends as meaning yes or no. In the present instance the pantomime consisted of a nod, and not a shake; so Nicholas took the answer as a favourable one.

"Now listen to me," said Nicholas, laying his hand on Newman's shoulder. "Before I would make an effort to see them, I deemed it expedient to come to you, lest, by gratifying my own selfish desire, I should inflict an injury upon them which I can never repair. What has my uncle heard from Yorkshire?"

Newman opened and shut his mouth several times, as though he were trying his utmost to speak, but could make nothing of it, and finally fixed his eyes on Nicholas with a grim and ghastly stare.

"What has he heard?" urged Nicholas, colouring. "You see that I am prepared to hear the very worst that malice can have suggested. Why should you conceal it from me? I must know it sooner or later; and what purpose can be gained by trifling with the matter for a few minutes, when half the time would put me in possession of all that has occurred? Tell me at once, pray."

"To-morrow morning," said Newman; "hear it to-morrow."

"What purpose would that answer?" urged Nicholas.

"You would sleep the better," replied Newman.

"I should sleep the worse," answered Nicholas impatiently. "Sleep! Exhausted as I am, and standing in no common need of rest, I cannot hope to close my eyes all night, unless you tell me everything."

"And if I should tell you everything?" said Newman, hesitating.

"Why, then you may rouse my indignation or wound my pride," rejoined Nicholas; "but you will not break my rest; for, if the scene were acted over again, I could take no other part than I have taken; and, whatever consequences may accrue to myself from it, I shall never regret doing as I have done—never, if I starve or beg in consequence. What is a little poverty or suffering to the disgrace of the basest and most inhuman cowardice? I tell you, if I had stood by tamely and passively, I should have hated myself, and merited the contempt of every man in existence. The black-hearted scoundrel!"

With this gentle allusion to the absent Mr. Squeers, Nicholas repressed his rising wrath, and relating to Newman exactly what had passed at

Dotheboys Hall, entreated him to speak out without more pressing. Thus adjured, Mr. Noggs took, from an old trunk, a sheet of paper, which appeared to have been scrawled over in great haste; and, after sundry extraordinary demonstrations of reluctance, delivered himself in the following terms.

"My dear young man, you mustn't give way to—this sort of thing will never do, you know—as to getting on in the world, if you take everybody's part that's ill treated—Damn it, I am proud to hear of it; and would have done it myself!"

Newman accompanied this very unusual outbreak with a violent blow upon the table, as if, in the heat of the moment, he had mistaken it for the chest or ribs of Mr. Wackford Squeers. Having, by this open declaration of his feelings, quite precluded himself from offering Nicholas any cautious worldly advice (which had been his first intention), Mr. Noggs went straight to the point.

"The day before yesterday," said Newman, "your uncle received this letter. I took a hasty copy of it while he was out. Shall I read it?"

"If you please," replied Nicholas. Newman Noggs accordingly read as follows:

"Dotheboys Hall,
"Thursday Morning.

"SIR,

"My pa requests me to write to you, the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuvver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen.

"We are in a state of mind beyond everything, and my pa is one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steepled in his Goar. We were kimpelled to have him carried down into the kitchen where he now lays. You will judge from this that he has been brought very low.

"When your nevew that you recommended for a teacher had done this to my pa and jumped upon his body with his feet and also langwedge which I will not pollewt my pen with describing, he assaulted my ma with dreadful violence, dashed her to the earth, and drove her back-comb several inches into her head. A very little more and it must have entered her skull. We have a medical certifiket that if it had, the tortershell would have affected the brain.

"Me and my brother were then the victims of his feury since which we have suffered very much which leads us to the arrowing belief that we have received some injury in our insides, especially as no marks of violence are visible externally. I am screaming out loud all the time I write and so is my brother which takes off my attention rather and I hope will excuse mistakes.

"The monster having sasiated his thirst for blood ran away, taking with him a boy of desperate caracter that he had excited to rebellyon, and a garnet ring belonging to my ma, and not having been apprehended by the constables is supposed to have been took up by some stage-coach. My pa begs that if he comes to you the ring may be returned, and that you will let the thief and assassin go, as if we prosecuted him he would only be transported, and if he is let go he is sure to be hung before long which will save us trouble and be much more satisfactory. Hoping to hear from you when convenient

"I remain
"Yours and cetrer
"FANNY SQUEERS.

"P.S.—I pity his ignorance and despise him."

A profound silence succeeded to the reading of this choice epistle, during which Newman Noggs, as he folded it up, gazed with a kind of grotesque pity at the boy of desperate character therein referred to; who, having no more distinct perception of the matter in hand than that he had been the unfortunate cause of heaping trouble and falsehood upon Nicholas, sat mute and dispirited, with a most woe-begone and heart-stricken look.

"Mr. Noggs," said Nicholas after a few moments' reflection, "I must go out at once."

"Go out!" cried Newman.

"Yes," said Nicholas, "to Golden Square. Nobody who knows me would believe this story of the ring; but it may suit the purpose, or gratify the hatred, of Mr. Ralph Nickleby to feign to attach credence to it. It is due—not to him, but to myself—that I should state the truth; and, moreover, I have a word or two to exchange with him which will not keep cool."

"They must," said Newman.

"They must not, indeed," rejoined Nicholas firmly, as he prepared to leave the house.

"Hear me speak," said Newman, planting himself before his impetuous young friend. "He is not there. He is away from town. He will not be back for three days; and I know that letter will not be answered before he returns."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Nicholas, chafing violently, and pacing the narrow room with rapid strides.

"Quite," rejoined Newman. "He had hardly

read it when he was called away. Its contents are known to nobody but himself and us."

"Are you certain?" demanded Nicholas precipitately; "not even to my mother or sister? If I thought that they—I will go there—I must see them. Which is the way? Where is it?"

"Now, be advised by me," said Newman, speaking for the moment, in his earnestness, like any other man—"make no effort to see even them till he comes home. I know the man. Do not seem to have been tampering with anybody. When he returns, go straight to him, and speak as boldly as you like. Guessing at the real truth, he knows it as well as you or I. Trust him for that."

"You mean well to me, and should know him better than I can," replied Nicholas after some consideration. "Well; let it be so."

Newman, who had stood during the foregoing conversation with his back planted against the door, ready to oppose any egress from the apartment by force, if necessary, resumed his seat with much satisfaction; and, as the water in the kettle was by this time boiling, made a glassful of spirits-and-water for Nicholas, and a cracked mug-full for the joint accommodation of himself and Smike, of which the two partook in great harmony, while Nicholas, leaning his head upon his hand, remained buried in melancholy meditation.

Meanwhile, the company below-stairs, after listening attentively, and not hearing any noise which would justify them in interfering for the gratification of their curiosity, returned to the chamber of the Kenwigses, and employed themselves in hazarding a great variety of conjectures relative to the cause of Mr. Noggs's sudden disappearance and detention.

"Lor, I'll tell you what," said Mrs. Kenwigs. "Suppose it should be an express sent up to say that his property has all come back again!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Kenwigs; "it's not impossible. Perhaps, in that case, we'd better send up and ask if he won't take a little more punch."

"Kenwigs!" said Mr. Lillyvick in a loud voice, "I'm surprised at you."

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Mr. Kenwigs with becoming submission to the collector of water-rates.

"Making such a remark as that, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick angrily. "He has had punch already, has he not, sir? I consider the way in which that punch was cut off, if I may use the expression, highly disrespectful to this company; scandalous, perfectly scandalous. It may be the custom to allow such things in this house, but it's not the kind of behaviour that I've been used to see displayed, and so I don't mind telling you, Kenwigs. A gentleman has a glass of punch before him, to which he is just about to set his lips, when another gentleman comes and collars that glass of punch, without a 'with your leave,' or 'by your leave,' and carries that glass of punch away. This may be good manners—I dare say it is—but I don't understand it, that's all; and what's more, I don't care if I never do. It's my way to speak my mind, Kenwigs, and that is my mind; and if you don't like it, it's past my regular time for going to bed, and I can find my way home without making it later."

Here was an untoward event! The collector had sat swelling and fuming in offended dignity for some minutes, and had now fairly burst out. The great man—the rich relation—the unmarried uncle—who had it in his power to make Morleena an heiress, and the very baby a legatee—was offended. Gracious Powers, where was this to end?

"I am very sorry, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs humbly.

"Don't tell me you're sorry," retorted Mr. Lillyvick with much sharpness. "You should have prevented it, then."

The company were quite paralysed by this domestic crash. The back-parlour sat with her mouth wide open, staring vacantly at the collector in a stupor of dismay; the other guests were scarcely less overpowered by the great man's irritation. Mr. Kenwigs, not being skilful in such matters, only fanned the flame in attempting to extinguish it.

"I didn't think of it, I am sure, sir," said that gentleman. "I didn't suppose that such a little thing as a glass of punch would have put you out of temper."

"Out of temper! What the devil do you mean by that piece of impertinence, Mr. Kenwigs?" said the collector. "Morleena, child—give me my hat."

"Oh! you're not going, Mr. Lillyvick, sir?" interposed Miss Petowker with her most bewitching smile.

But still Mr. Lillyvick, regardless of the siren, cried obdurately, "Morleena, my hat!" upon the fourth repetition of which demand Mrs. Kenwigs sunk back in her chair, with a cry that might have softened a water-butt, not to say a water-collector; while the four little girls (privately instructed to that effect) clasped their uncle's drab shorts in their arms, and prayed him, in imperfect English, to remain.

"Why should I stop here, my dears?" said Mr. Lillyvick; "I'm not wanted here."

"Oh! do not speak so cruelly, uncle," sobbed Mrs. Kenwigs, "unless you wish to kill me."

"I shouldn't wonder if some people were to say I did," replied Mr. Lillyvick, glancing angrily at Kenwigs. "Out of temper!"

"Oh! I cannot bear to see him look so at my husband," cried Mrs. Kenwigs. "It's so dreadful in families. Oh!"

"Mr. Lillyvick," said Kenwigs, "I hope, for the sake of your niece, that you won't object to be reconciled."

The collector's features relaxed, as the company added their entreaties to those of his nephew-in-law. He gave up his hat, and held out his hand.

"There, Kenwigs," said Mr. Lillyvick; "and let me tell you, at the same time, to show you how much out of temper I was, that if I had gone away without another word, it would have made no difference respecting that pound or two which I shall leave among your children when I die."

"Morleena Kenwigs!" cried her mother in a torrent of affection. "Go down upon your knees to your dear uncle, and beg him to love you all his life through, for he's more a angel than a man, and I've always said so."

Miss Morleena approaching to do homage, in compliance with this injunction, was summarily caught up and kissed by Mr. Lillyvick; and thereupon Mrs. Kenwigs darted forward and kissed the collector, and an irrepressible murmur of applause broke from the company who had witnessed his magnanimity.

The worthy gentleman then became once more the life and soul of the society; being again reinstated in his old post of lion, from which high station the temporary distraction of their thoughts had for a moment dispossessed him. Quadruped lions are said to be savage only when they are hungry; biped lions are rarely sulky longer than when their appetite for distinction remains unappeased. Mr. Lillyvick stood higher than ever; for he had shown his power; hinted at his property and testamentary intentions; gained great credit for disinterestedness and virtue; and, in addition to all, was finally accommodated with a much larger tumbler of punch than that which Newman Noggs had so feloniously made off with.

"I say! I beg everybody's pardon for intruding again," said Crowl, looking in at this happy juncture; "but what a queer business this is, isn't it? Noggs has lived in this house, now, going on for five years, and nobody has ever been to see him before, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant."

"It's a strange time of night to be called away, sir, certainly," said the collector; "and the behaviour of Mr. Noggs himself is, to say the least of it, mysterious."

"Well, so it is," rejoined Crowl; "and I'll tell you what's more—I think these two geniuses, whoever they are, have run away from somewhere."

"What makes you think that, sir?" demanded the collector, who seemed, by a tacit understanding, to have been chosen and elected mouthpiece to the company. "You have no reason to suppose that they have run away from anywhere without paying the rates and taxes due, I hope?"

Mr. Crowl, with a look of some contempt, was about to enter a general protest against the payment of rates or taxes under any circumstances, when he was checked by a timely whisper from Kenwigs, and several frowns and winks from Mrs. K., which providentially stopped him.

"Why, the fact is," said Crowl, who had been listening at Newman's door with all his might and main; "the fact is, that they have been talking so loud, that they quite disturbed me in my room, and so I couldn't help catching a word here, and a word there: and all I heard certainly seemed to refer to their having bolted from some place or other. I don't wish to alarm Mrs. Kenwigs; but I hope they haven't come from any gaol or hospital, and brought away a fever, or some unpleasantness of that sort, which might be catching for the children."

Mrs. Kenwigs was so overpowered by this supposition, that it needed all the tender attentions of Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, to restore her to anything like a state of calmness; not to mention the assiduity of Mr. Kenwigs, who held a fat smelling-bottle to his lady's nose, until it became matter of some doubt whether the tears which coursed down her face were the result of feelings or *sal volatile*.

The ladies, having expressed their sympathy singly and separately, fell, according to custom, into a little chorus of soothing expressions, among which such condolences as "Poor dear!"—"I should feel just the same if I was her"—"To be sure, it's a very trying thing"—and "Nobody but a mother knows what a mother's feelings is," were among the most prominent, and most frequently repeated. In short, the opinion of the company was so clearly manifested, that Mr. Kenwigs was on the point of repairing to Mr. Noggs's room, to demand an

explanation, and had, indeed, swallowed a preparatory glass of punch with great inflexibility and steadiness of purpose, when the attention of all present was diverted by a new and terrible surprise.

This was nothing less than the sudden pouring forth of a rapid succession of the shrillest and most piercing screams from an upper story; and, to all appearance, from the very two-pair back in which the infant Kenwigs was at that moment enshrined. They were no sooner audible than Mrs. Kenwigs, opining that a strange cat had come in, and sucked the baby's breath while the girl was asleep, made for the door, wringing her hands, and shrieking dismally; to the great consternation and confusion of the company.

"Mr. Kenwigs, see what it is; make haste!" cried the sister, laying violent hands upon Mrs. Kenwigs, and holding her back by force. "Oh! don't twist about so, dear, or I can never hold you."

"My baby, my blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed baby!" screamed Mrs. Kenwigs, making every blessed louder than the last. "My own darling, sweet, innocent Lillyvick! Oh, let me go to him! Let me go-o-o-o!"

Pending the utterance of these frantic cries, and the wails and lamentations of the four little girls, Mr. Kenwigs rushed up-stairs to the room whence the sounds proceeded; at the door of which he encountered Nicholas, with the child in his arms, who darted out with such violence, that the anxious father was thrown down six stairs, and alighted on the nearest landing-place, before he had found time to open his mouth to ask what was the matter.

"Don't be alarmed," cried Nicholas, running down; "here it is; it's all out, it's all over; pray compose yourselves; there's no harm done;" and, with these and a thousand other assurances, he delivered the baby (whom, in his hurry, he had carried upside down) to Mrs. Kenwigs, and ran back to assist Mr. Kenwigs, who was rubbing his head very hard, and looking much bewildered by his tumble.

Reassured by this cheering intelligence, the company in some degree recovered from their fears, which had been productive of some most singular instances of a total want of presence of mind; thus, the bachelor friend had, for a long time, supported in his arms Mrs. Kenwigs's sister, instead of Mrs. Kenwigs; and the worthy Mr. Lillyvick had been actually seen, in the perturbation of his spirits, to kiss Miss Petowker several times, behind the room-door, as calmly as if nothing distressing were going forward.

"It is a mere nothing," said Nicholas, returning to Mrs. Kenwigs; "the little girl, who was watching the child, being tired I suppose, fell asleep, and set her hair on fire."

"Oh, you malicious little wretch!" cried Mrs. Kenwigs, impressively shaking her forefinger at the small unfortunate, who might be thirteen years old, and was looking on with a singed head and a frightened face.

"I heard her cries," continued Nicholas, "and ran down in time to prevent her setting fire to anything else. You may depend upon it that the child is not hurt; for I took it off the bed myself, and brought it here to convince you."

This brief explanation over, the infant, who, as he was christened after the collector, rejoiced in the names of Lillyvick Kenwigs, was partially suffocated under the caresses of the audience, and squeezed to his mother's bosom until he roared again. The attention of the company was then directed, by a natural transition, to the little girl who had had the audacity to burn her hair off, and who, after receiving sundry small slaps and pushes from the more energetic of the ladies, was mercifully sent home: the ninepence, with which she was to have been rewarded, being escheated to the Kenwigs family.

"And whatever we are to say to you, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Kenwigs, addressing young Lillyvick's deliverer, "I am sure I don't know."

"You need say nothing at all," replied Nicholas. "I have done nothing to found any very strong claim upon your eloquence, I am sure."

"He might have been burnt to death, if it hadn't been for you, sir," simpered Miss Petowker.

"Not very likely, I think," replied Nicholas; "for there was abundance of assistance here, which must have reached him before he had been in any danger."

"You will let us drink your health, anyways, sir?" said Mr. Kenwigs, motioning towards the table.

"In my absence, by all means," rejoined Nicholas with a smile. "I have had a very fatiguing journey, and should be most indifferent company—a far greater check upon your merriment than a promoter of it, even if I kept awake, which I think very doubtful. If you will allow me, I'll return to my friend, Mr. Noggs, who went up-stairs again when he found nothing serious had occurred. Good night."

Excusing himself, in these terms, from joining in the festivities, Nicholas took a most winning farewell of Mrs. Kenwigs and the other ladies,

and retired, after making a very extraordinary impression upon the company.

"What a delightful young man!" cried Mrs. Kenwigs.

"Uncommon gentlemanly, really," said Mr. Kenwigs. "Don't you think so, Mr. Lillyvick?"

"Yes," said the collector with a dubious shrug of his shoulders. "He *is* gentlemanly, very gentlemanly—in appearance."

"I hope you don't see anything against him, uncle?" inquired Mrs. Kenwigs.

"No, my dear," replied the collector, "no. I trust he may not turn out—well—no matter—my love to you, my dear, and long life to the baby!"

"Your namesake," said Mrs. Kenwigs with a sweet smile.

"And I hope a worthy namesake," observed Mr. Kenwigs, willing to propitiate the collector. "I hope a baby as will never disgrace his godfather, and as may be considered, in arter years, of a piece with the Lillyvicks whose name he bears. I do say—and Mrs. Kenwigs is of the same sentiment, and feels it as strong as I do—that I consider his being called Lillyvick one of the greatest blessings and *h*onours of my existence."

"*The* greatest blessing, Kenwigs," murmured his lady.

"*The* greatest blessing," said Mr. Kenwigs, correcting himself. "A blessing that I hope, one of these days, I may be able to deserve."

This was a politic stroke of the Kenwigses, because it made Mr. Lillyvick the great head and fountain of the baby's importance. The good gentleman felt the delicacy and dexterity of the touch, and at once proposed the health of the gentleman, name unknown, who had signalised himself, that night, by his coolness and alacrity.

"Who, I don't mind saying," observed Mr. Lillyvick as a great concession, "is a good-looking young man enough, with manners that I hope his character may be equal to."

"He has a very nice face and style, really," said Mrs. Kenwigs.

"He certainly has," added Miss Petowker. "There's something in his appearance quite——Dear, dear, what's that word again?"

"What word?" inquired Mr. Lillyvick.

"Why—dear me, how stupid I am!" replied Miss Petowker, hesitating. "What do you call it when Lords break off door-knockers and beat policemen, and play at coaches with other people's money, and all that sort of thing?"

"Aristocratic?" suggested the collector.

"Ah! aristocratic," replied Miss Petowker; "something very aristocratic about him, isn't there?"

The gentlemen held their peace, and smiled at each other, as who should say, "Well! there's no accounting for tastes;" but the ladies resolved unanimously that Nicholas had an aristocratic air; and nobody caring to dispute the position, it was established triumphantly.

The punch being, by this time, drunk out, and the little Kenwigses (who had for some time previously held their little eyes open with their little forefingers) becoming fractious, and requesting rather urgently to be put to bed, the collector made a move by pulling out his watch, and acquainting the company that it was nigh two o'clock; whereat some of the guests were surprised and others shocked, and hats and bonnets being groped for under the tables, and in course of time found, their owners went away, after a vast deal of shaking of hands, and many remarks how they had never spent such a delightful evening, and how they marvelled to find it so late, expecting to have heard that it was half-past ten at the very latest, and how they wished that Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs had a wedding-day once a week, and how they wondered by what hidden agency Mrs. Kenwigs could possibly have managed so well; and a great deal more of the same kind. To all of which flattering expressions Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs replied by thanking every lady and gentleman, *seriatim*, for the favour of their company, and hoping they might have enjoyed themselves only half as well as they said they had.

As to Nicholas, quite unconscious of the impression he had produced, he had long since fallen asleep, leaving Mr. Newman Noggs and Smike to empty the spirit-bottle between them; and this office they performed with such extreme good-will, that Newman was equally at a loss to determine whether he himself was quite sober, and whether he had ever seen any gentleman so heavily, drowsily, and completely intoxicated as his new acquaintance.

CHAPTER XVI.

NICHOLAS SEEKS TO EMPLOY HIMSELF IN A NEW CAPACITY, AND, BEING UNSUCCESSFUL, ACCEPTS AN ENGAGEMENT AS TUTOR IN A PRIVATE FAMILY.

THE first care of Nicholas, next morning, was to look after some room in which, until better times dawned upon him, he could con-

trive to exist, without trenching upon the hospitality of Newman Noggs, who would have slept upon the stairs with pleasure, so that his young friend was accommodated.

The vacant apartment, to which the bill in the parlour window bore reference, appeared, on inquiry, to be a small back-room on the second floor, reclaimed from the leads, and overlooking a soot-bespeckled prospect of tiles and chimney-pots. For the letting of this portion of the house from week to week, on reasonable terms, the parlour lodger was empowered to treat; he being deputed by the landlord to dispose of the rooms as they became vacant, and to keep a sharp look-out that the lodgers didn't run away. As a means of securing the punctual discharge of which last service he was permitted to live rent free, lest he should at any time be tempted to run away himself.

Of this chamber Nicholas became the tenant; and having hired a few common articles of furniture from a neighbouring broker, and paid the first week's hire in advance, out of a small fund raised by the conversion of some spare clothes into ready money, he sat himself down to ruminate upon his prospects, which, like the prospect outside his window, were sufficiently confined and dingy. As they by no means improved on better acquaintance, and as familiarity breeds contempt, he resolved to banish them from his thoughts by dint of hard walking. So, taking up his hat, and leaving poor Smike to arrange and rearrange the room with as much delight as if it had been the costliest palace, he betook himself to the streets, and mingled with the crowd which thronged them.

Although a man may lose a sense of his own importance when he is a mere unit among a busy throng, all utterly regardless of him, it by no means follows that he can dispossess himself, with equal facility, of a very strong sense of the importance and magnitude of his cares. The unhappy state of his own affairs was the one idea which occupied the brain of Nicholas, walk as fast as he would; and, when he tried to dislodge it by speculating on the situation and prospects of the people who surrounded him, he caught himself, in a few seconds, contrasting their condition with his own, and gliding almost imperceptibly back into his old train of thought again.

Occupied in these reflections, as he was making his way along one of the great public thoroughfares of London, he chanced to raise his eyes to a blue board, whereon was inscribed, in characters of gold, "General Agency Office; for places and situations of all kinds inquire within." It was a shop-front, fitted up with a gauze blind and an inner door; and in the window hung a long and tempting array of written placards, announcing vacant places of every grade, from a secretary's to a footboy's.

Nicholas halted, instinctively, before this temple of promise, and ran his eye over the capital-text openings in life which were so profusely displayed. When he had completed his survey he walked on a little way, and then back, and then on again; at length, after pausing irresolutely several times before the door of the General Agency Office, he made up his mind, and stepped in.

He found himself in a little floor-clothed room, with a high desk railed off in one corner, behind which sat a lean youth with cunning eyes and a protruding chin, whose performances in capital-text darkened the window. He had a thick ledger lying open before him, and with the fingers of his right hand inserted between the leaves, and his eyes fixed on a very fat old lady in a mob-cap—evidently the proprietress of the establishment—who was airing herself at the fire, seemed to be only waiting her directions to refer to some entries contained within its rusty clasps.

As there was a board outside, which acquainted the public that servants-of-all-work were perpetually in waiting to be hired from ten till four, Nicholas knew at once that some half-dozen strong young women, each with pattens and an umbrella, who were sitting upon a form in one corner, were in attendance for that purpose; especially as the poor things looked anxious and weary. He was not quite so certain of the callings and stations of two smart young ladies who were in conversation with the fat lady before the fire, until—having sat himself down in a corner, and remarked that he would wait until the other customers had been served—the fat lady resumed the dialogue which his entrance had interrupted.

"Cook, Tom," said the fat lady, still airing herself as aforesaid.

"Cook," said Tom, turning over some leaves of the ledger. "Well!"

"Read out an easy place or two," said the fat lady.

"Pick out very light ones, if you please, young man," interposed a genteel female, in shepherd's-plaid boots, who appeared to be the client.

"'Mrs. Marker,'" said Tom, reading, "'Russell Place, Russell Square; offers eighteen guineas; tea and sugar found. Two in family,

and see very little company. Five servants kept. No man. No followers.'"

"Oh Lor!" tittered the client. "*That* won't do. Read another, young man, will you?"

"'Mrs. Wrymug,'" said Tom, "'Pleasant Place, Finsbury. Wages, twelve guineas. No tea, no sugar. Serious family——'"

"Ah! you needn't mind reading that," interrupted the client.

"'Three serious footmen,'" said Tom impressively.

"Three, did you say?" asked the client in an altered tone.

"Three serious footmen," replied Tom. "'Cook, housemaid, and nursemaid; each female servant required to join the Little Bethel Congregation three times every Sunday—with a serious footman. If the cook is more serious than the footman, she will be expected to improve the footman; if the footman is more serious than the cook, he will be expected to improve the cook.'"

"I'll take the address of that place," said the client; "I don't know but what it mightn't suit me pretty well."

"Here's another," remarked Tom, turning over the leaves. "'Family of Mr. Gallanbile, M.P. Fifteen guineas, tea and sugar, and servants allowed to see male cousins, if godly. Note. Cold dinner in the kitchen on the Sabbath, Mr. Gallanbile being devoted to the Observance question. No victuals whatever cooked on the Lord's Day, with the exception of dinner for Mr. and Mrs. Gallanbile, which, being a work of piety and necessity, is exempted. Mr. Gallanbile dines late on the day of rest, in order to prevent the sinfulness of the cook's dressing herself.'"

"I don't think that'll answer as well as the other," said the client after a little whispering with her friend. "I'll take the other direction if you please, young man. I can but come back again, if it don't do."

Tom made out the address as requested, and the genteel client, having satisfied the fat lady with a small fee, meanwhile, went away, accompanied by her friend.

As Nicholas opened his mouth, to request the young man to turn to letter S, and let him know what secretaryships remained undisposed of, there came into the office an applicant, in whose favour he immediately retired, and whose appearance both surprised and interested him.

This was a young lady who could be scarcely eighteen, of very slight and delicate figure, but exquisitely shaped, who, walking timidly up to the desk, made an inquiry, in a very low tone of voice, relative to some situation as governess, or companion to a lady. She raised her veil, for an instant, while she preferred the inquiry, and disclosed a countenance of most uncommon beauty, though shaded by a cloud of sadness, which, in one so young, was doubly remarkable. Having received a card of reference to some person on the books, she made the usual acknowledgment, and glided away.

She was neatly, but very quietly attired; so much so, indeed, that it seemed as though her dress, if it had been worn by one who imparted fewer graces of her own to it, might have looked poor and shabby. Her attendant—for she had one—was a red-faced, round-eyed, slovenly girl, who, from a certain roughness about the bare arms that peeped from under her draggled shawl, and the half-washed-out traces of smut and black-lead which tattooed her countenance, was clearly of a kin with the servants-of-all-work on the form: between whom and herself there had passed various grins and glances, indicative of the freemasonry of the craft.

This girl followed her mistress; and, before Nicholas had recovered from the first effects of his surprise and admiration, the young lady was gone. It is not a matter of such complete and utter improbability as some sober people may think, that he would have followed them out, had he not been restrained by what passed between the fat lady and her book-keeper.

"When is she coming again, Tom?" asked the fat lady.

"To-morrow morning," replied Tom, mending his pen.

"Where have you sent her to?" asked the fat lady.

"Mrs. Clark's," replied Tom.

"She'll have a nice life of it if she goes there," observed the fat lady, taking a pinch of snuff from a tin box.

Tom made no other reply than thrusting his tongue into his cheek, and pointing the feather of his pen towards Nicholas—reminders which elicited from the fat lady an inquiry of "Now, sir, what can we do for *you?*"

Nicholas briefly replied that he wanted to know whether there was any such post to be had as secretary or amanuensis to a gentleman.

"Any such!" rejoined the mistress; "a dozen such. An't there, Tom?"

"*I* should think so," answered that young gentleman; and, as he said it, he winked towards Nicholas, with a degree of familiarity which he, no doubt, intended for a rather

flattering compliment, but with which Nicholas was most ungratefully disgusted.

Upon reference to the book, it appeared that the dozen secretaryships had dwindled down to one. Mr. Gregsbury, the great member of Parliament, of Manchester Buildings, Westminster, wanted a young man to keep his papers and correspondence in order; and Nicholas was exactly the sort of young man that Mr. Gregsbury wanted.

"I don't know what the terms are, as he said he'd settle them himself with the party," observed the fat lady; "but they must be pretty good ones, because he's a member of Parliament."

Inexperienced as he was, Nicholas did not feel quite assured of the force of this reasoning, or the justice of this conclusion; but, without troubling himself to question it, he took down the address, and resolved to wait upon Mr. Gregsbury without delay.

"I don't know what the number is," said Tom; "but Manchester Buildings isn't a large place; and if the worst comes to the worst, it

"THERE CAME INTO THE OFFICE AN APPLICANT, IN WHOSE FAVOUR HE IMMEDIATELY RETIRED, AND WHOSE APPEARANCE BOTH SURPRISED AND INTERESTED HIM."

won't take you very long to knock at all the doors on both sides of the way till you find him out. I say, what a good-looking gal that was, wasn't she?"

"What girl?" demanded Nicholas sternly.

"Oh yes! I know—what gal, eh?" whispered Tom, shutting one eye, and cocking his chin in the air. "You didn't see her, you didn't! I say, don't you wish you was me when she comes to-morrow morning?"

Nicholas looked at the ugly clerk as if he had a mind to reward his admiration of the young lady by beating the ledger about his ears, but he refrained, and strode haughtily out of the office; setting at defiance, in his indignation, those ancient laws of chivalry, which not only made it proper and lawful for all good knights to bear the praise of the ladies to whom they were devoted, but rendered it incumbent upon them to roam about the world, and knock at head all such matter-of-fact and unpoetical characters as declined to exalt, above all the earth, damsels whom they had never chanced to look upon or hear of—as if that were any excuse!

Thinking no longer of his own misfortunes, but wondering what could be those of the beautiful girl he had seen, Nicholas, with many wrong turns, and many inquiries, and almost as many misdirections, bent his steps towards the place whither he had been directed.

Within the precincts of the ancient city of Westminster, and within half a quarter of a mile of its ancient sanctuary, is a narrow and dirty region, the sanctuary of the smaller members of Parliament in modern days. It is all comprised in one street of gloomy lodging-houses, from whose windows, in vacation-time, there frown long melancholy rows of bills, which say, as plainly as did the countenances of their occupiers, ranged on ministerial and opposition benches in the session which slumbers with its fathers, "To Let," "To Let." In busier periods of the year these bills disappear, and the houses swarm with legislators. There are legislators in the parlours, in the first floor, in the second, in the third, in the garrets; the small apartments reek with the breath of deputations and delegates. In damp weather the place is rendered close by the steams of moist Acts of Parliament and frouzy petitions; general postmen grow faint as they enter its infected limits; and shabby figures, in quest of franks, flit restlessly to and fro like the troubled ghosts of Complete Letter-writers departed. This is Manchester Buildings; and here, at all hours of the night, may be heard the rattling of latch-keys in their respective keyholes: with now and then—when a gust of wind, sweeping across the water which washes the Buildings' feet, impels the sound towards its entrance—the weak, shrill voice of some young member practising to-morrow's speech. All the livelong day, there is a grinding of organs and clashing and clanging of little boxes of music; for Manchester Buildings is an eel-pot, which has no outlet but its awkward mouth—a case-bottle which has no thoroughfare, and a short and narrow neck—and in this respect it may be typical of the fate of some few among its more adventurous residents, who, after wriggling themselves into Parliament by violent efforts and contortions, find that it, too, is no thoroughfare for them; that, like Manchester Buildings, it leads to nothing beyond itself; and that they are fain at last to back out, no wiser, no richer, not one whit more famous than they went in.

Into Manchester Buildings Nicholas turned, with the address of the great Mr. Gregsbury in his hand. As there was a stream of people pouring into a shabby house not far from the entrance, he waited until they had made their way in, and then, making up to the servant, ventured to inquire if he knew where Mr. Gregsbury lived.

The servant was a very pale, shabby boy, who looked as if he had slept underground from his infancy, as very likely he had. "Mr. Gregsbury?" said he. "Mr. Gregsbury lodges here. It's all right. Come in!"

Nicholas thought he might as well get in while he could, so in he walked; and he had no sooner done so than the boy shut the door, and made off.

This was odd enough; but what was more embarrassing was, that all along the passage, and all along the narrow stairs, blocking up the window, and making the dark entry darker still, was a confused crowd of persons with great importance depicted in their looks; who were, to all appearance, waiting in silent expectation of some coming event. From time to time, one man would whisper his neighbour, or a little group would whisper together, and then the whisperers would nod fiercely to each other, or give their heads a relentless shake, as if they were bent upon doing something very desperate, and were determined not to be put off, whatever happened.

As a few minutes elapsed without anything occurring to explain this phenomenon, and as he felt his own position a peculiarly uncomfortable one, Nicholas was on the point of seeking some information from the man next him, when a sudden move was visible on the stairs, and a voice was heard to cry, "Now, gentlemen, have the goodness to walk up!"

So far from walking up, the gentlemen on the stairs began to walk down with great alacrity, and to entreat, with extraordinary politeness, that the gentlemen nearest the street would go first; the gentlemen nearest the street retorted, with equal courtesy, that they couldn't think of such a thing on any account; but they did it, without thinking of it, inasmuch as the other gentlemen pressing some half-dozen (among whom was Nicholas) forward, and closing up behind, pushed them, not merely up the stairs, but into the very sitting-room of Mr. Gregsbury, which they were thus compelled to enter with most unseemly precipitation, and without the means of retreat; the press behind them more than filling the apartment.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Gregsbury, "you are welcome. I am rejoiced to see you."

For a gentleman who was rejoiced to see a body of visitors, Mr. Gregsbury looked as uncomfortable as might be; but perhaps this was occasioned by senatorial gravity, and a states-

manlike habit of keeping his feelings under control. He was a tough, burly, thick-headed gentleman, with a loud voice, a pompous manner, a tolerable command of sentences with no meaning in them, and, in short, every requisite for a very good member indeed.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Gregsbury, tossing a great bundle of papers into a wicker basket at his feet, and throwing himself back in his chair with his arms over the elbows, "you are dissatisfied with my conduct, I see by the newspapers."

"Yes, Mr. Gregsbury, we are," said a plump old gentleman in a violent heat, bursting out of the throng, and planting himself in the front.

"Do my eyes deceive me," said Mr. Gregsbury, looking towards the speaker, "or is that my old friend Pugstyles?"

"I am that man, and no other, sir," replied the plump old gentleman.

"Give me your hand, my worthy friend," said Mr. Gregsbury. "Pugstyles, my dear friend, I am very sorry to see you here."

"I am very sorry to be here, sir," said Mr. Pugstyles; "but your conduct, Mr. Gregsbury, has rendered this deputation from your constituents imperatively necessary."

"My conduct, Pugstyles," said Mr. Gregsbury, looking round upon the deputation with gracious magnanimity—"my conduct has been, and ever will be, regulated by a sincere regard for the true and real interests of this great and happy country. Whether I look at home or abroad; whether I behold the peaceful industrious communities of our island home: her rivers covered with steamboats, her roads with locomotives, her streets with cabs, her skies with balloons of a power and magnitude hitherto unknown in the history of aëronautics in this or any other nation—I say, whether I look merely at home, or, stretching my eyes farther, contemplate the boundless prospect of conquest and possession—achieved by British perseverance and British valour — which is outspread before me, I clasp my hands, and, turning my eyes to the broad expanse above my head, exclaim, 'Thank Heaven, I am a Briton.'"

The time had been when this burst of enthusiasm would have been cheered to the very echo; but now the deputation received it with chilling coldness. The general impression seemed to be that, as an explanation of Mr. Gregsbury's political conduct, it did not enter quite enough into detail; and one gentleman in the rear did not scruple to remark aloud that, for his purpose, it savoured rather too much of a "gammon" tendency.

"The meaning of that term—gammon," said Mr. Gregsbury, "is unknown to me. If it means that I grow a little too fervid, or perhaps even hyperbolical, in extolling my native land, I admit the full justice of the remark. I *am* proud of this free and happy country. My form dilates, my eye glistens, my breast heaves, my heart swells, my bosom burns, when I call to mind her greatness and her glory."

"We wish, sir," remarked Mr. Pugstyles calmly, "to ask you a few questions."

"If you please, gentlemen; my time is yours—and my country's—and my country's," said Mr. Gregsbury.

This permission being conceded, Mr. Pugstyles put on his spectacles, and referred to a written paper which he drew from his pocket; whereupon nearly every other member of the deputation pulled a written paper from *his* pocket, to check Mr. Pugstyles off as he read the questions.

This done, Mr. Pugstyles proceeded to business.

"Question number one.—Whether, sir, you did not give a voluntary pledge, previous to your election, that, in event of your being returned, you would immediately put down the practice of coughing and groaning in the House of Commons. And whether you did not submit to be coughed and groaned down in the very first debate of the session, and have since made no effort to effect a reform in this respect? Whether you did not also pledge yourself to astonish the government, and make them shrink in their shoes? And whether you have astonished them, and made them shrink in their shoes, or not?"

"Go on to the next one, my dear Pugstyles," said Mr. Gregsbury.

"Have you any explanation to offer with reference to that question, sir?" asked Mr. Pugstyles.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Gregsbury.

The members of the deputation looked fiercely at each other, and afterwards at the member. "Dear Pugstyles," having taken a very long stare at Mr. Gregsbury over the tops of his spectacles, resumed his list of inquiries.

"Question number two.—Whether, sir, you did not likewise give a voluntary pledge that you would support your colleague on every occasion; and whether you did not, the night before last, desert him and vote upon the other side, because the wife of a leader on that other

side had invited Mrs. Gregsbury to an evening party?"

"Go on," said Mr. Gregsbury.

"Nothing to say on that either, sir?" asked the spokesman.

"Nothing whatever," replied Mr. Gregsbury. The deputation, who had only seen him at canvassing or election time, were struck dumb by his coolness. He didn't appear like the same man; then he was all milk and honey; now he was all starch and vinegar. But men *are* so different at different times!

"Question number three—and last," said Mr. Pugstyles emphatically. "Whether, sir, you did not state, upon the hustings, that it was your firm and determined intention to oppose everything proposed; to divide the House upon every question, to move for returns on every subject, to place a motion on the books every day, and, in short, in your own memorable words, to play the very devil with everything and everybody?" With this comprehensive inquiry Mr. Pugstyles folded up his list of questions, as did all his backers.

Mr. Gregsbury reflected, blew his nose, threw himself further back in his chair, came forward again, leaning his elbows on the table, made a triangle with his two thumbs and his two forefingers, and, tapping his nose with the apex thereof, replied (smiling as he said it), "I deny everything."

At this unexpected answer, a hoarse murmur arose from the deputation; and the same gentleman who had expressed an opinion relative to the gammoning nature of the introductory speech, again made a monosyllabic demonstration, by growling out "Resign!" Which growl, being taken up by his fellows, swelled into a very earnest and general remonstrance.

"I am requested, sir, to express a hope," said Mr. Pugstyles with a distant bow, "that, on receiving a requisition to that effect from a great majority of your constituents, you will not object at once to resign your seat in favour of some candidate whom they think they can better trust."

To this Mr. Gregsbury read the following reply, which, anticipating the request, he had composed in the form of a letter, whereof copies had been made to send round to the newspapers.

"My dear Mr. Pugstyles,

"Next to the welfare of our beloved island—this great and free and happy country, whose powers and resources are, I sincerely believe, illimitable—I value that noble independence which is an Englishman's proudest boast, and which I fondly hope to bequeath to my children, untarnished and unsullied. Actuated by no personal motives, but moved only by high and great constitutional considerations; which I will not attempt to explain, for they are really beneath the comprehension of those who have not made themselves masters, as I have, of the intricate and arduous study of politics; I would rather keep my seat, and intend doing so.

"Will you do me the favour to present my compliments to the constituent body, and acquaint them with this circumstance?

"With great esteem,

"My dear Mr. Pugstyles,

"&c. &c."

"Then you will not resign under any circumstances?" asked the spokesman.

Mr. Gregsbury smiled, and shook his head.

"Then, good morning, sir," said Pugstyles angrily.

"Heaven bless you!" said Mr. Gregsbury. And the deputation, with many growls and scowls, filed off as quickly as the narrowness of the staircase would allow of their getting down.

The last man being gone, Mr. Gregsbury rubbed his hands and chuckled, as merry fellows will when they think they have said or done a more than commonly good thing. He was so engrossed in this self-congratulation, that he did not observe that Nicholas had been left behind in the shadow of the window curtains, until that young gentleman, fearing he might otherwise overhear some soliloquy intended to have no listeners, coughed twice or thrice, to attract the member's notice.

"What's that?" said Mr. Gregsbury in sharp accents.

Nicholas stepped forward, and bowed.

"What do you do here, sir?" asked Mr. Gregsbury. "A spy upon my privacy! A concealed voter! You have heard my answer, sir. Pray follow the deputation."

"I should have done so, if I had belonged to it, but I do not," said Nicholas.

"Then how came you here, sir?" was the natural inquiry of Mr. Gregsbury, M.P. "And where the devil have you come from, sir?" was the question which followed it.

"I brought this card from the General Agency Office, sir," said Nicholas, "wishing to offer myself as your secretary, and understanding that you stood in need of one."

"That's all you have come for, is it?" said Mr. Gregsbury, eyeing him in some doubt.

Nicholas replied in the affirmative.

"You have no connection with any of those rascally papers, have you?" said Mr. Gregsbury. "You didn't get into the room to hear what was going forward, and put it in print, eh?"

"I have no connection, I am sorry to say, with anything at present," rejoined Nicholas,—politely enough, but quite at his ease.

"Oh!" said Mr. Gregsbury. "How did you find your way up here, then?"

Nicholas related how he had been forced up by the deputation.

"That was the way, was it?" said Mr. Gregsbury. "Sit down."

Nicholas took a chair, and Mr. Gregsbury stared at him for a long time, as if to make certain, before he asked any further questions, that there were no objections to his outward appearance.

"You want to be my secretary, do you?" he said at length.

"I wish to be employed in that capacity, sir," replied Nicholas.

"Well," said Mr. Gregsbury; "now, what can you do?"

"I suppose," replied Nicholas, smiling, "that I can do what falls usually to the lot of other secretaries."

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Gregsbury.

"What is it?" replied Nicholas.

"Ah! What is it?" retorted the member, looking shrewdly at him, with his head on one side.

"A secretary's duties are rather difficult to define, perhaps," said Nicholas, considering. "They include, I presume, correspondence?"

"Good," interposed Mr. Gregsbury.

"The arrangement of papers and documents."

"Very good."

"Occasionally, perhaps, the writing from your dictation; and possibly, sir," said Nicholas with a half-smile, "the copying of your speech for some public journal, when you have made one of more than usual importance."

"Certainly," rejoined Mr. Gregsbury. "What else?"

"Really," said Nicholas after a moment's reflection, "I am not able, at this instant, to recapitulate any other duty of a secretary, beyond the general one of making himself as agreeable and useful to his employer as he can, consistently with his own respectability, and without overstepping that line of duties which he undertakes to perform, and which the designation of his office is usually understood to imply."

Mr. Gregsbury looked fixedly at Nicholas for a short time, and then, glancing warily round the room, said in a suppressed voice:

"This is all very well, Mr. —— what is your name?"

"Nickleby."

"This is all very well, Mr. Nickleby, and very proper, so far as it goes—so far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. There are other duties, Mr. Nickleby, which a secretary to a parliamentary gentleman must never lose sight of. I should require to be crammed, sir."

"I beg your pardon," interposed Nicholas, doubtful whether he had heard aright.

"—To be crammed, sir," repeated Mr. Gregsbury.

"May I beg your pardon again, if I inquire what you mean, sir?" said Nicholas.

"My meaning, sir, is perfectly plain," replied Mr. Gregsbury with a solemn aspect. "My secretary would have to make himself master of the foreign policy of the world as it is mirrored in the newspapers; to run his eye over all accounts of public meetings, all leading articles, and accounts of the proceedings of public bodies; and to make notes of anything which it appeared to him might be made a point of, in any little speech upon the question of some petition lying on the table, or anything of that kind. Do you understand?"

"I think I do, sir," replied Nicholas.

"Then," said Mr. Gregsbury, "it would be necessary for him to make himself acquainted, from day to day, with newspaper paragraphs on passing events; such as, 'Mysterious disappearance and supposed suicide of a potboy,' or anything of that sort, upon which I might found a question to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Then, he would have to copy the question, and as much as I remembered of the answer (including a little compliment about independence and good sense); and to send the manuscript in a frank to the local paper, with perhaps half-a-dozen lines of leader, to the effect that I was always to be found in my place in Parliament, and never shrunk from the responsible and arduous duties, and so forth. You see?"

Nicholas bowed.

"Besides which," continued Mr. Gregsbury, "I should expect him, now and then, to go through a few figures in the printed tables, and to pick out a few results, so that I might come out pretty well on timber-duty questions, and finance questions, and so on; and I should like him to get up a few little arguments about the disastrous effects of a return to cash payments and a metallic currency, with a touch now and then about the

exportation of bullion, and the Emperor of Russia, and bank notes, and all that kind of thing, which it's only necessary to talk fluently about, because nobody understands it. Do you take me?"

"I think I understand," said Nicholas.

"With regard to such questions as are not political," continued Mr. Gregsbury, warming; "and which one can't be expected to care a curse about, beyond the natural care of not allowing inferior people to be as well off as ourselves—else where are our privileges?—I should wish my secretary to get together a few little flourishing speeches of a patriotic cast. For instance, if any preposterous bill were brought forward for giving poor grubbing devils of authors a right to their own property, I should like to say that I, for one, would never consent to opposing an insurmountable bar to the diffusion of literature among *the people*,—you understand?—that the creations of the pocket, being man's, might belong to one man, or one family; but that the creations of the brain, being God's, ought, as a matter of course, to belong to the people at large—and if I was pleasantly disposed, I should like to make a joke about posterity, and say that those who wrote for posterity should be content to be rewarded by the approbation *of* posterity; it might take with the House, and could never do me any harm, because posterity can't be expected to know anything about me, or my jokes either—do you see?"

"I see that, sir," replied Nicholas.

"You must always bear in mind, in such cases as this, where our interests are not affected," said Mr. Gregsbury, "to put it very strong about the people, because it comes out very well at election-time; and you could be as funny as you liked about the authors; because I believe the greater part of them live in lodgings, and are not voters. This is a hasty outline of the chief things you'd have to do, except waiting in the lobby every night, in case I forgot anything, and should want fresh cramming; and, now and then, during great debates, sitting in the front row of the gallery, and saying to the people about—'You see that gentleman, with his hand to his face, and his arm twisted round the pillar—that's Mr. Gregsbury—the celebrated Mr. Gregsbury,'—with any other little eulogium that might strike you at the moment. And for salary," said Mr. Gregsbury, winding up with great rapidity; for he was out of breath—"and for salary, I don't mind saying at once in round numbers, to prevent any dissatisfaction—though it's more than I've been accustomed to give—fifteen shillings a week, and find yourself. There!"

With this handsome offer, Mr. Gregsbury once more threw himself back in his chair, and looked like a man who had been most profligately liberal, but is determined not to repent of it notwithstanding.

"Fifteen shillings a week is not much," said Nicholas mildly.

"Not much! Fifteen shillings a week not much, young man!" cried Mr. Gregsbury. "Fifteen shillings a——"

"Pray do not suppose that I quarrel with the sum, sir," replied Nicholas; "for I am not ashamed to confess that, whatever it may be in itself, to me it is a great deal. But the duties and responsibilities make the recompense small, and they are so very heavy that I fear to undertake them."

"Do you decline to undertake them, sir?" inquired Mr. Gregsbury, with his hand on the bell-rope.

"I fear they are too great for my powers, however good my will may be, sir," replied Nicholas.

"That is as much as to say that you had rather not accept the place, and that you consider fifteen shillings a week too little," said Mr. Gregsbury, ringing. "Do you decline it, sir?"

"I have no alternative but to do so," replied Nicholas.

"Door, Matthews!" said Mr. Gregsbury as the boy appeared.

"I am sorry I have troubled you unnecessarily, sir," said Nicholas.

"I am sorry you have," rejoined Mr. Gregsbury, turning his back upon him. "Door, Matthews!"

"Good morning, sir," said Nicholas.

"Door, Matthews!" cried Mr. Gregsbury.

The boy beckoned Nicholas, and, tumbling lazily down-stairs before him, opened the door, and ushered him into the street. With a sad and pensive air, he retraced his steps homewards.

Smike had scraped a meal together from the remnant of last night's supper, and was anxiously awaiting his return. The occurrences of the morning had not improved Nicholas's appetite, and, by him, the dinner remained untasted. He was sitting in a thoughtful attitude, with the plate which the poor fellow had assiduously filled with the choicest morsels, untouched, by his side, when Newman Noggs looked into the room.

"Come back?" asked Newman.

"Yes," replied Nicholas, "tired to death: and, what is worse, might have remained at home for all the good I have done."

"Couldn't expect to do much in one morning," said Newman.

"Maybe so, but I am sanguine, and did expect," said Nicholas, "and am proportionately disappointed." Saying which, he gave Newman an account of his proceedings.

"If I could do anything," said Nicholas, "anything, however slight, until Ralph Nickleby returns, and I have eased my mind by confronting him, I should feel happier. I should think it no disgrace to work, Heaven knows. Lying indolently here, like a half-tamed sullen beast, distracts me."

"I don't know," said Newman; "small things offer—they would pay the rent, and more—but you wouldn't like them; no, you could hardly be expected to undergo it—no, no."

"What could I hardly be expected to undergo?" asked Nicholas, raising his eyes. "Show me, in this wide waste of London, any honest means by which I could even defray the weekly hire of this poor room, and see if I shrink from resorting to them! Undergo! I have undergone too much, my friend, to feel pride or squeamishness now. Except," added Nicholas hastily, after a short silence, "except such squeamishness as is common honesty, and so much pride as constitutes self-respect. I see little to choose between assistant to a brutal pedagogue, and toad-eater to a mean and ignorant upstart, be he member or no member."

"I hardly know whether I should tell you what I heard this morning, or not," said Newman.

"Has it reference to what you said just now?" asked Nicholas.

"It has."

"Then, in Heaven's name, my good friend, tell it me," said Nicholas. "For God's sake consider my deplorable condition; and, while I promise to take no step without taking counsel with you, give me, at least, a vote in my own behalf."

Moved by this entreaty, Newman stammered forth a variety of most unaccountable and entangled sentences, the upshot of which was, that Mrs. Kenwigs had examined him, at great length that morning, touching the origin of his acquaintance with, and the whole life, adventures, and pedigree of, Nicholas; that Newman had parried these questions as long as he could, but being, at length, hard pressed and driven into a corner, had gone so far as to admit that Nicholas was a tutor of great accomplishments, involved in some misfortunes which he was not at liberty to explain, and bearing the name of Johnson. That Mrs. Kenwigs, impelled by gratitude, or ambition, or maternal pride, or maternal love, or all four powerful motives conjointly, had taken secret conference with Mr. Kenwigs, and had finally returned to propose that Mr. Johnson should instruct the four Miss Kenwigses in the French language, as spoken by natives, at the weekly stipend of five shillings, current coin of the realm; being at the rate of one shilling per week, per each Miss Kenwigs, and one shilling over, until such time as the baby might be able to take it out in grammar.

"Which, unless I am very much mistaken," observed Mrs. Kenwigs in making the proposition, "will not be very long; for such clever children, Mr. Noggs, never were born into this world, I do believe."

"There," said Newman, "that's all. It's beneath you, I know; but I thought that perhaps you might——"

"Might!" cried Nicholas with great alacrity; "of course I shall. I accept the offer at once. Tell the worthy mother so without delay, my dear fellow; and that I am ready to begin whenever she pleases."

Newman hastened, with joyful steps, to inform Mrs. Kenwigs of his friend's acquiescence, and soon returning, brought back word that they would be happy to see him in the first floor as soon as convenient; that Mrs. Kenwigs had, upon the instant, sent out to secure a second-hand French grammar and dialogues, which had long been fluttering in the sixpenny box at the book-stall round the corner; and that the family, highly excited at the prospect of this addition to their gentility, wished the initiatory lesson to come off immediately.

And here it may be observed that Nicholas was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a young man of high spirit. He would resent an affront to himself, or interpose to redress a wrong offered to another, as boldly and freely as any knight that ever set lance in rest; but he lacked that peculiar excess of coolness and great-minded selfishness, which invariably distinguish gentlemen of high spirit. In truth, for our own part, we are disposed to look upon such gentlemen as being rather encumbrances than otherwise in rising families: happening to be acquainted with several whose spirit prevents their settling down to any grovelling occupation, and only displays itself in a tendency to culti-

vate moustaches, and look fierce; and although moustaches and ferocity are both very pretty things in their way, and very much to be commended, we confess to a desire to see them bred at the owner's proper cost, rather than at the expense of low-spirited people.

Nicholas, therefore, not being a high-spirited young man according to common parlance, and deeming it a greater degradation to borrow, for the supply of his necessities, from Newman Noggs than to teach French to the little Kenwigses for five shillings a week, accepted the offer with the alacrity already described, and betook himself to the first floor with all convenient speed.

Here he was received by Mrs. Kenwigs with a genteel air, kindly intended to assure him of her protection and support; and here, too, he found Mr. Lillyvick and Miss Petowker; the four Miss Kenwigses on their form of audience; and the baby in a dwarf porter's chair with a deal tray before it, amusing himself with a toy horse without a head; the said horse being composed of a small wooden cylinder, not unlike un Italian iron, supported on four crooked pegs, and painted in ingenious resemblance of red wafers set in blacking.

"How do you do, Mr. Johnson?" said Mrs. Kenwigs. "Uncle—Mr. Johnson."

"How do you do, sir?" said Mr. Lillyvick—rather sharply; for he had not known what Nicholas was on the previous night, and it was rather an aggravating circumstance if a tax-collector had been too polite to a teacher.

"Mr. Johnson is engaged as a private master to the children, uncle," said Mrs. Kenwigs.

"So you said just now, my dear," replied Mr. Lillyvick.

"But I hope," said Mrs. Kenwigs, drawing herself up, "that that will not make them proud; but that they will bless their own good fortune, which has born them superior to common people's children. Do you hear, Morleena?"

"Yes, ma," replied Miss Kenwigs.

"And when you go out in the streets, or elsewhere, I desire that you don't boast of it to the other children," said Mrs. Kenwigs; "and that, if you must say anything about it, you don't say no more than 'We've got a private master comes to teach us at home, but we ain't proud, because ma says it's sinful.' Do you hear, Morleena?"

"Yes, ma," replied Miss Kenwigs again.

"Then mind you recollect, and do as I tell you," said Mrs. Kenwigs. "Shall Mr. Johnson begin, uncle?"

"I am ready to hear, if Mr. Johnson is ready to commence, my dear," said the collector, assuming the air of a profound critic. "What sort of language do you consider French, sir?"

"How do you mean?" asked Nicholas.

"Do you consider it a good language, sir?" said the collector; "a pretty language, a sensible language?"

"A pretty language, certainly," replied Nicholas; "and as it has a name for everything, and admits of elegant conversation about everything, I presume it is a sensible one."

"I don't know," said Mr. Lillyvick doubtfully. "Do you call it a cheerful language, now?"

"Yes," replied Nicholas, "I should say it was, certainly."

"It's very much changed since my time, then," said the collector, "very much."

"Was it a dismal one in your time?" asked Nicholas, scarcely able to repress a smile.

"Very," replied Mr. Lillyvick with some vehemence of manner. "It's the war-time that I speak of; the last war. It may be a cheerful language. I should be sorry to contradict anybody; but I can only say that I've heard the French prisoners, who were natives, and ought to know how to speak it, talking in such a dismal manner, that it made one miserable to hear them. Ay, that I have, fifty times, sir—fifty times!"

Mr. Lillyvick was waxing so cross, that Mrs. Kenwigs thought it expedient to motion to Nicholas not to say anything; and it was not until Miss Petowker had practised several blandishments, to soften the excellent old gentleman, that he deigned to break silence by asking,

"What's the water in French, sir?"

"*L'Eau*," replied Nicholas.

"Ah!" said Mr. Lillyvick, shaking his head mournfully, "I thought as much. Lo, eh? I don't think anything of that language—nothing at all."

"I suppose the children may begin, uncle?" said Mrs. Kenwigs.

"Oh yes; they may begin, my dear!" replied the collector discontentedly. "*I* have no wish to prevent them."

This permission being conceded, the four Miss Kenwigses sat in a row, with their tails all one way, and Morleena at the top: while Nicholas, taking the book, began his preliminary explanations. Miss Petowker and Mrs. Kenwigs looked on in silent admiration, broken only by the whispered assurances of the latter that Morleena would have it all by heart in no time; and Mr. Lillyvick regarded the group

with frowning and attentive eyes, lying in wait for something upon which he could open a fresh discussion on the language.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOLLOWS THE FORTUNES OF MISS NICKLEBY.

IT was with a heavy heart, and many sad forebodings which no effort could banish, that Kate Nickleby, on the morning appointed for the commencement of her engagement with Madame Mantalini, left the City when its clocks yet wanted a quarter of an hour of eight, and threaded her way alone, amid the noise and bustle of the streets, towards the West-end of London.

At this early hour many sickly girls, whose business, like that of the poor worm, is to produce, with patient toil, the finery that bedecks the thoughtless and luxurious, traverse our streets, making towards the scene of their daily labour, and catching as if by stealth, in their hurried walk, the only gasp of wholesome air and glimpse of sun-light which cheer their monotonous existence during the long train of hours that make a working day. As she drew nigh to the more fashionable quarter of the town, Kate marked many of this class as they passed by, hurrying like herself to their painful occupation, and saw, in their unhealthy looks and feeble gait, but too clear an evidence that her misgivings were not wholly groundless.

She arrived at Madame Mantalini's some minutes before the appointed hour, and after walking a few times up and down, in the hope that some other female might arrive and spare her the embarrassment of stating her business to the servant, knocked timidly at the door: which, after some delay, was opened by the footman, who had been putting on his striped jacket as he came up-stairs, and was now intent on fastening his apron.

"Is Madame Mantalini in?" faltered Kate.

"Not often out at this time, miss," replied the man in a tone which rendered 'Miss' something more offensive than 'My dear.'

"Can I see her?" asked Kate.

"Eh?" replied the man, holding the door in his hand, and honouring the inquirer with a stare and a broad grin. "Lord, no!"

"I came by her own appointment," said Kate; "I am—I am—to be employed here."

"Oh! you should have rung the workers' bell," said the footman, touching the handle of one in the door-post. "Let me see, though, I forgot—Miss Nickleby, is it?"

"Yes," replied Kate.

"You're to walk up-stairs, then, please," said the man. "Madame Mantalini wants to see you—this way—take care of these things on the floor."

Cautioning her, in these terms, not to trip over a heterogeneous litter of pastrycook's trays, lamps, waiters full of glasses, and piles of rout seats which were strewn about the hall, plainly bespeaking a late party on the previous night, the man led the way to the second story, and ushered Kate into a back-room, communicating by folding doors with the apartment in which she had first seen the mistress of the establishment.

"If you'll wait here a minute," said the man, "I'll tell her presently." Having made this promise with much affability, he retired and left Kate alone.

There was not much to amuse in the room; of which the most attractive feature was, a half-length portrait in oil of Mr. Mantalini, whom the artist had depicted scratching his head in an easy manner, and thus displaying to advantage a diamond ring, the gift of Madame Mantalini before her marriage. There was, however, the sound of voices in conversation in the next room; and, as the conversation was loud and the partition thin, Kate could not help discovering that they belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Mantalini.

"If you will be odiously, demnebly, outrigeously jealous, my soul," said Mr. Mantalini, "you will be very miserable—horrid miserable—demnition miserable." And then there was a sound as though Mr. Mantalini were sipping his coffee.

"I *am* miserable," returned Madame Mantalini, evidently pouting.

"Then you are an ungrateful, unworthy, demd unthankful little fairy," said Mr. Mantalini.

"I am not," returned madame with a sob.

"Do not put itself out of humour," said Mr. Mantalini, breaking an egg. "It is a pretty, bewitching little demd countenance, and it should not be out of humour, for it spoils its loveliness, and makes it cross and gloomy like a frightful, naughty, demd hobgoblin."

"I am not to be brought round in that way always," rejoined madame sulkily.

"It shall be brought round in any way it likes best, and not brought round at all if it likes that better," retorted Mr. Mantalini, with his egg-spoon in his mouth.

"It's very easy to talk," said Mrs. Mantalini.

"Not so easy when one is eating a demnition egg," replied Mr. Mantalini; "for the yolk runs down the waistcoat, and yolk of egg does not match any waistcoat but a yellow waistcoat, demmit."

"You were flirting with her during the whole night," said Madame Mantalini, apparently desirous to lead the conversation back to the point from which it had strayed.

"No, no, my life."

"You were," said madame; "I had my eye upon you all the time."

"Bless the little winking twinkling eye! was it on me all the time?" cried Mantalini in a sort of lazy rapture. "Oh, demmit!"

"And I say once more," resumed madame, "that you ought not to waltz with anybody but your own wife; and I will not bear it, Mantalini, if I take poison first."

"She will not take poison and have horrid pains, will she?" said Mantalini; who, by the altered sound of his voice, seemed to have moved his chair, and taken up his position nearer to his wife. "She will not take poison, because she had a demd fine husband who might have married two countesses and a dowager——"

"Two countesses!" interposed madame. "You told me one before!"

"Two!" cried Mantalini. "Two demd fine women, real countesses, and splendid fortunes, demmit."

"And why didn't you?" asked madame playfully.

"Why didn't I?" replied her husband. "Had I not seen, at a morning concert, the demdest little fascinator in all the world, and while that little fascinator is my wife, may not all the countesses and dowagers in England be——"

Mr. Mantalini did not finish the sentence, but he gave Madame Mantalini a very loud kiss, which Madame Mantalini returned; after which there seemed to be some more kissing mixed up with the progress of the breakfast.

"And what about the cash, my existence's jewel?" said Mantalini when these endearments ceased. "How much have we in hand?"

"Very little indeed," replied madame.

"We must have some more," said Mantalini; "we must have some discount out of old Nickleby to carry on the war with, demmit."

"You can't want any more just now," said madame coaxingly.

"My life and soul," returned her husband, "there is a horse for sale at Scrubbs's, which it would be a sin and a crime to lose—going, my senses' joy, for nothing."

"For nothing!" cried madame. "I am glad of that."

"For actually nothing," replied Mantalini. "A hundred guineas down will buy him; mane, and crest, and legs, and tail, all of the demdest beauty. I will ride him in the park before the very chariots of the rejected countesses. The demd old dowager will faint with grief and rage; the other two will say, 'He is married, he has made away with himself, it is a demd thing, it is all up!' They will hate each other demnebly, and wish you dead and buried. Ha! ha! Demmit."

Madame Mantalini's prudence, if she had any, was not proof against these triumphal pictures: after a little jingling of keys, she observed that she would see what her desk contained, and, rising for that purpose, opened the folding door, and walked into the room where Kate was seated.

"Dear me, child!" exclaimed Madame Mantalini, recoiling in surprise. "How came you here?"

"Child!" cried Mantalini, hurrying in. "How came—eh?—oh!—demmit, how d'ye do?"

"I have been waiting here some time, ma'am," said Kate, addressing Madame Mantalini. "The servant must have forgotten to let you know that I was here, I think."

"You really must see to that man," said madame, turning to her husband. "He forgets everything."

"I will twist his demd nose off his countenance for leaving such a very pretty creature all alone by herself," said her husband.

"Mantalini!" cried madame, "you forget yourself."

"I don't forget *you*, my soul, and never shall, and never can," said Mantalini, kissing his wife's hand, and grimacing aside to Miss Nickleby, who turned away.

Appeased by this compliment, the lady of the business took some papers from her desk, which she handed over to Mr. Mantalini, who received them with great delight. She then requested Kate to follow her, and, after several feints on the part of Mr. Mantalini to attract the young lady's attention, they went away: leaving that gentleman extended at full length on the sofa, with his heels in the air, and a newspaper in his hand.

Madame Mantalini led the way down a flight of stairs, and through a passage, to a large room at the back of the premises, where were a number of young women employed in sewing, cutting out, making up, altering, and various

other processes known only to those who are cunning in the arts of millinery and dressmaking. It was a close room with a sky-light, and as dull and quiet as a room need be.

On Madame Mantalini calling aloud for Miss Knag, a short, bustling, over-dressed female, full of importance, presented herself, and all the young ladies, suspending their operations for the moment, whispered to each other sundry criticisms upon the make and texture of Miss Nickleby's dress, her complexion, cast of features, and personal appearance, with as much good-breeding as could have been displayed by the very best society in a crowded ball-room.

"Oh, Miss Knag!" said Madame Mantalini, "this is the young person I spoke to you about." Miss Knag bestowed a reverential smile upon Madame Mantalini, which she dexterously transformed into a gracious one for Kate, and said that certainly, although it was a great deal of trouble to have young people who were wholly unused to the business, still she was sure the young person would try to do her best—impressed with which conviction she (Miss Knag) felt an interest in her already.

"I think that, for the present at all events, it will be better for Miss Nickleby to come into the show-room with you, and try things on for people," said Madame Mantalini. "She will not be able, for the present, to be of much use in any other way; and her appearance will——"

"Suit very well with mine, Madame Mantalini," interrupted Miss Knag. "So it will; and to be sure I might have known that you would not be long in finding that out; for you have so much taste in all those matters, that really, as I often say to the young ladies, I do not know how, when, or where you possibly could have acquired all you know—hem! Miss Nickleby and I are quite a pair, Madame Mantalini, only I am a little darker than Miss Nickleby, and—hem!—I think my foot may be a little smaller. Miss Nickleby, I am sure, will not be offended at my saying that, when she hears that our family always have been celebrated for small feet ever since—hem!—ever since our family had any feet at all, indeed, I think. I had an uncle once, Madame Mantalini, who lived in Cheltenham, and had a most excellent business as a tobacconist—hem—who had such small feet, that they were no bigger than those which are usually joined to wooden legs—the most symmetrical feet, Madame Mantalini, that even you can imagine."

"They must have had something the appearance of club feet, Miss Knag," said madame.

"Well, now, that is so like you," returned Miss Knag. "Ha! ha! ha! Of club feet! Oh, very good! As I often remark to the young ladies, 'Well, I must say, and I do not care who knows it, of all the ready humour—hem!—I ever heard anywhere'—and I have heard a good deal; for, when my dear brother was alive (I kept house for him, Miss Nickleby), we had to supper once a week two or three young men, highly celebrated in those days for their humour, Madame Mantalini—'Of all the ready humour,' I say to the young ladies, '*I* ever heard, Madame Mantalini's is the most remarkable—hem! It is so gentle, so sarcastic, and yet so good-natured (as I was observing to Miss Simmonds only this morning), that how, or when, or by what means she acquired it, is to me a mystery indeed.'"

Here Miss Knag paused to take breath, and while she pauses it may be observed—not that she was marvellously loquacious and marvellously deferential to Madame Mantalini, since these are facts which require no comment; but that every now and then she was accustomed, in the torrent of her discourse, to introduce a loud, shrill, clear "hem!" the import and meaning of which was variously interpreted by her acquaintance; some holding that Miss Knag dealt in exaggeration, and introduced the monosyllable when any fresh invention was in course of coinage in her brain; others, that when she wanted a word, she threw it in to gain time, and prevent anybody else from striking into the conversation. It may be further remarked that Miss Knag still aimed at youth, although she had shot beyond it years ago; and that she was weak and vain, and one of those people who are best described by the axiom, that you may trust them as far as you can see them, and no farther.

"You'll take care that Miss Nickleby understands her hours, and so forth," said Madame Mantalini; "and so I'll leave her with you. You'll not forget my directions, Miss Knag?"

Miss Knag of course replied that to forget anything Madame Mantalini had directed was a moral impossibility; and that lady, dispensing a general good morning among her assistants, sailed away.

"Charming creature, isn't she, Miss Nickleby?" said Miss Knag, rubbing her hands together.

"I have seen very little of her," said Kate. "I hardly know yet."

"Have you seen Mr. Mantalini?" inquired Miss Knag.

"Yes; I have seen him twice."

"Isn't *he* a charming creature?"

"Indeed, he does not strike me as being so, by any means," replied Kate.

"No, my dear!" cried Miss Knag, elevating her hands. "Why, goodness gracious mercy, where's your taste? Such a fine tall, full-whiskered, dashing, gentlemanly man, with such teeth and hair, and—hem!—well, now, you *do* astonish me."

"I dare say I am very foolish," replied Kate, laying aside her bonnet; "but, as my opinion is of very little importance to him or any one else, I do not regret having formed it, and shall be slow to change it, I think."

"He is a very fine man, don't you think so?" asked one of the young ladies.

"Indeed, he may be, for anything I could say to the contrary," replied Kate.

"And drives very beautiful horses, doesn't he?" inquired another.

"I dare say he may, but I never saw them," answered Kate.

"Never saw them!" interposed Miss Knag. "Oh, well! There it is at once, you know. How can you possibly pronounce an opinion about a gentleman—hem!—if you don't see him as he turns out altogether?"

There was so much of the world—even of the little world of the country girl—in this idea of the old milliner, that Kate, who was anxious, for every reason, to change the subject, made no further remark, and left Miss Knag in possession of the field.

After a short silence, during which most of the young people made a closer inspection of Kate's appearance, and compared notes respecting it, one of them offered to help her off with her shawl, and, the offer being accepted, inquired whether she did not find black very uncomfortable wear.

"I do indeed," replied Kate with a bitter sigh.

"So dusty and hot," observed the same speaker, adjusting her dress for her.

Kate might have said that mourning is sometimes the coldest wear which mortals can assume; that it not only chills the breasts of those it clothes, but, extending its influence to summer friends, freezes up their sources of good-will and kindness, and, withering all the buds of promise they once so liberally put forth, leaves nothing but bared and rotten hearts exposed. There are few who have lost a friend or relative constituting in life their sole dependence, who have not keenly felt this chilling influence of their sable garb. She had felt it acutely, and, feeling it at the moment, could not quite restrain her tears.

"I am very sorry to have wounded you by my thoughtless speech," said her companion. "I did not think of it. You are in mourning for some near relation?"

"For my father," answered Kate.

"For what relation, Miss Simmonds?" asked Miss Knag in an audible voice.

"Her father," replied the other softly.

"Her father, eh?" said Miss Knag without the slightest depression of her voice. "Ah! A long illness, Miss Simmonds?"

"Hush!" replied the girl; "I don't know."

"Our misfortune was very sudden," said Kate, turning away, "or I might perhaps, at a time like this, be enabled to support it better."

There had existed not a little desire in the room, according to invariable custom, when any new "young person" came, to know who Kate was, and what she was, and all about her; but, although it might have been very naturally increased by her appearance and emotion, the knowledge that it pained her to be questioned was sufficient to repress even this curiosity; and Miss Knag, finding it hopeless to attempt extracting any further particulars just then, reluctantly commanded silence, and bade the work proceed.

In silence, then, the tasks were plied until half-past one, when a baked leg of mutton, with potatoes to correspond, were served in the kitchen. The meal over, and the young ladies having enjoyed the additional relaxation of washing their hands, the work began again, and was again performed in silence, until the noise of carriages rattling through the streets, and of loud double knocks at doors, gave token that the day's work of the more fortunate members of society was proceeding in its turn.

One of these double knocks at Madame Mantalini's door announced the equipage of some great lady—or rather rich one, for there is occasionally a distinction between riches and greatness—who had come with her daughter to approve of some court dresses which had been a long time preparing, and upon whom Kate was deputed to wait, accompanied by Miss Knag, and officered, of course, by Madame Mantalini.

Kate's part in the pageant was humble enough, her duties being limited to holding articles of costume until Miss Knag was ready to try them on, and now and then tying a string, or fastening a hook-and-eye. She might, not unreasonably, have supposed herself beneath the reach of any arrogance, or bad humour; but it happened that the lady and daughter were both out of temper that day, and the poor girl came in for her share of their revilings. She was awkward—her hands

were cold—dirty—coarse—she could do nothing right; they wondered how Madame Mantalini could have such people about her; requested they might see some other young woman the next time they came; and so forth.

So common an occurrence would be hardly deserving of mention, but for its effect. Kate shed many bitter tears when these people were gone, and felt, for the first time, humbled by her occupation. She had, it is true, quailed at the prospect of drudgery and hard service; but she had felt no degradation in working for her bread, until she found herself exposed to insolence and pride. Philosophy would have taught her that the degradation was on the side of those who had sunk so low as to display such passions habitually, and without cause: but she was too young for such consolation, and her honest feeling was hurt. May not the complaint, that common people are above their station, often

"I DON'T FORGET YOU, MY SOUL, AND NEVER SHALL, AND NEVER CAN," SAID MANTALINI, KISSING HIS WIFE'S HAND, AND GRIMACING ASIDE TO MISS NICKLEBY, WHO TURNED AWAY.

take its rise in the fact of *un*common people being below theirs?

In such scenes and occupations the time wore on until nine o'clock, when Kate, jaded and dispirited with the occurrences of the day, hastened from the confinement of the workroom, to join her mother at the street corner, and walk home: the more sadly from having to disguise her real feelings, and feign to participate in all the sanguine visions of her companion.

"Bless my soul, Kate!" said Mrs. Nickleby; "I've been thinking all day what a delightful thing it would be for Madame Mantalini to take you into partnership—such a likely thing too, you know! Why, your poor dear papa's cousin's sister-in-law—a Miss Browndock—was taken into partnership by a lady that kept a school at Hammersmith, and made her fortune in no time at all. I forget, by-the-bye, whether that Miss Browndock was the same lady that got the ten thousand pounds prize in the lottery, but I think she was; indeed, now I come to think of it, I

am sure she was. 'Mantalini and Nickleby,' how well it would sound!—and, if Nicholas has any good fortune, you might have Doctor Nickleby, the head master of Westminster School, living in the same street."

"Dear Nicholas!" cried Kate, taking from her reticule her brother's letter from Dotheboys Hall. "In all our misfortunes, how happy it makes me, mamma, to hear he is doing well, and to find him writing in such good spirits! It consoles me for all we may undergo, to think that he is comfortable and happy."

Poor Kate! she little thought how weak her consolation was, and how soon she would be undeceived.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS KNAG, AFTER DOTING ON KATE NICKLEBY FOR THREE WHOLE DAYS, MAKES UP HER MIND TO HATE HER FOR EVERMORE. THE CAUSES WHICH LED MISS KNAG TO FORM THIS RESOLUTION.

THERE are many lives of much pain, hardship, and suffering, which, having no stirring interest for any but those who lead them, are disregarded by persons who do not want thought or feeling, but who pamper their compassion, and need high stimulants to rouse it.

There are not a few among the disciples of charity who require, in their vocation, scarcely less excitement than the votaries of pleasure in theirs; and hence it is that diseased sympathy and compassion are every day expended on out-of-the-way objects, when only too many demands upon the legitimate exercise of the same virtues in a healthy state are constantly within the sight and hearing of the most unobservant person alive. In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations from a thickly-peopled city to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real, hard, struggling work-a-day life there is in that romance, the better.

The life to which poor Kate Nickleby was devoted, in consequence of the unforeseen train of circumstances already developed in this narrative, was a hard one; but lest the very dulness, unhealthy confinement, and bodily fatigue, which made up its sum and substance, should deprive it of any interest with the mass of the charitable and sympathetic, I would rather keep Miss Nickleby herself in view, just now, than chill them in the outset by a minute and lengthened description of the establishment presided over by Madame Mantalini.

"Well, now, indeed, Madame Mantalini," said Miss Knag, as Kate was taking her weary way homewards on the first night of her novitiate; "that Miss Nickleby is a very creditable young person—a very creditable young person indeed—hem!—upon my word, Madame Mantalini, it does very extraordinary credit, even to your discrimination, that you should have found such a very excellent, very well-behaved, very—hem!—very unassuming young woman to assist in the fitting-on. I have seen some young women, when they had the opportunity of displaying before their betters, behave in such a—oh dear!—well—but you're always right, Madame Mantalini, always; and, as I very often tell the young ladies, how you do contrive to be always right, when so many people are so often wrong, is to me a mystery indeed."

"Beyond putting a very excellent client out of humour, Miss Nickleby has not done anything very remarkable to-day—that I am aware of, at least," said Madame Mantalini in reply.

"Oh dear!" said Miss Knag; "but you must allow a great deal for inexperience, you know."

"And youth?" inquired madame.

"Oh! I say nothing about that, Madame Mantalini," replied Miss Knag, reddening; "because, if youth were any excuse, you wouldn't have——"

"Quite so good a forewoman as I have, I suppose," suggested madame.

"Well, I never did know anybody like you, Madame Mantalini," rejoined Miss Knag most complacently, "and that's the fact, for you know what one's going to say before it has time to rise to one's lips. Oh, very good! Ha, ha, ha!"

"For myself," observed Madame Mantalini, glancing with affected carelessness at her assistant, and laughing heartily in her sleeve, "I consider Miss Nickleby the most awkward girl I ever saw in my life."

"Poor dear thing!" said Miss Knag, "it's not her fault. If it was, we might hope to cure it; but as it's her misfortune, Madame Mantalini, why really, you know, as the man said about the blind horse, we ought to respect it."

"Her uncle told me she had been considered pretty," remarked Madame Mantalini. "I think her one of the most ordinary girls I ever met with."

"Ordinary!" cried Miss Knag with a countenance beaming delight; "and awkward! Well, all I can say is, Madame Mantalini, that I quite love the poor girl; and that if she was twice as indifferent-looking, and twice as awkward as she is, I should be only so much the more her friend, and that's the truth of it."

In fact, Miss Knag had conceived an incipient affection for Kate Nickleby, after witnessing her failure that morning, and this short conversation with her superior increased the favourable prepossession to a most surprising extent; which was the more remarkable as, when she first scanned that young lady's face and figure, she had entertained certain inward misgivings that they would never agree.

"But now," said Miss Knag, glancing at the reflection of herself in a mirror at no great distance, "I love her—I quite love her—I declare I do!"

Of such a highly disinterested quality was this devoted friendship, and so superior was it to the little weaknesses of flattery or ill-nature, that the kind-hearted Miss Knag candidly informed Kate Nickleby, next day, that she saw she would never do for the business, but that she need not give herself the slightest uneasiness on this account, for that she (Miss Knag), by increased exertions on her own part, would keep her as much as possible in the background, and that all she would have to do would be to remain perfectly quiet before company, and to shrink from attracting notice by every means in her power. This last suggestion was so much in accordance with the timid girl's own feelings and wishes, that she readily promised implicit reliance on the excellent spinster's advice: without questioning, or, indeed, bestowing a moment's reflection upon, the motives that dictated it.

"I take quite a lively interest in you, my dear soul, upon my word," said Miss Knag; "a sister's interest, actually. It's the most singular circumstance I ever knew."

Undoubtedly it was singular that, if Miss Knag did feel a strong interest in Kate Nickleby, it should not rather have been the interest of a maiden aunt or grandmother; that being the conclusion to which the difference in their respective ages would have naturally tended. But Miss Knag wore clothes of a very youthful pattern, and perhaps her feelings took the same shape.

"Bless you!" said Miss Knag, bestowing a kiss upon Kate at the conclusion of the second day's work; "how very awkward you have been all day!"

"I fear your kind and open communication, which has rendered me more painfully conscious of my own defects, has not improved me," sighed Kate.

"No, no, I dare say not," rejoined Miss Knag in a most uncommon flow of good-humour. "But how much better that you should know it at first, and so be able to go on straight and comfortable! Which way are you walking, my love?"

"Towards the City," replied Kate.

"The City!" cried Miss Knag, regarding herself with great favour in the glass as she tied her bonnet. "Goodness gracious me! now, do you really live in the City?"

"Is it so very unusual for anybody to live there?" asked Kate, half smiling.

"I couldn't have believed it possible that any young woman could have lived there, under any circumstances whatever, for three days together," replied Miss Knag.

"Reduced—I should say poor people," answered Kate, correcting herself hastily, for she was afraid of appearing proud, "must live where they can."

"Ah! very true, so they must; very proper indeed!" rejoined Miss Knag with that sort of half-sigh which, accompanied by two or three slight nods of the head, is pity's small change in general society; "and that's what I very often tell my brother when our servants go away ill, one after another, and he thinks the back-kitchen's rather too damp for 'em to sleep in. These sort of people, I tell him, are glad to sleep anywhere! Heaven suits the back to the burden. What a nice thing it is to think that it should be so, isn't it?"

"Very," replied Kate.

"I'll walk with you part of the way, my dear," said Miss Knag, "for you must go very near our house; and, as it's quite dark, and our last servant went to the hospital a week ago with St. Anthony's fire in her face, I shall be glad of your company."

Kate would willingly have excused herself from this flattering companionship; but Miss Knag, having adjusted her bonnet to her entire satisfaction, took her arm with an air which plainly showed how much she felt the compliment she was conferring, and they were in the street before she could say another word.

"I fear," said Kate, hesitating, "that mamma—my mother, I mean—is waiting for me."

"You needn't make the least apology, my dear," said Miss Knag, smiling sweetly as she spoke; "I dare say she is a very respectable old person, and I shall be quite—hem!—quite pleased to know her."

As poor Mrs. Nickleby was cooling—not her heels alone, but her limbs generally, at the street corner, Kate had no alternative but to make her known to Miss Knag, who, doing the last new carriage customer at second-hand, acknowledged the introduction with condescending politeness. The three then walked away arm-in-arm: with Miss Knag in the middle, in a special state of amiability.

"I have taken such a fancy to your daughter, Mrs. Nickleby, you can't think," said Miss Knag after she had proceeded a little distance in dignified silence.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Mrs. Nickleby; "though it is nothing new to me that even strangers should like Kate."

"Hem!" cried Miss Knag.

"You will like her better when you know how good she is," said Mrs. Nickleby. "It is a great blessing to me, in my misfortunes, to have a child who knows neither pride nor vanity, and whose bringing-up might very well have excused a little of both at first. You don't know what it is to lose a husband, Miss Knag."

As Miss Knag had never yet known what it was to gain one, it followed, very nearly as a matter of course, that she didn't know what it was to lose one; so she said, in some haste, "No, indeed I don't," and said it with an air intending to signify that she should like to catch herself marrying anybody—no, no, she knew better than that.

"Kate has improved even in this little time, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Nickleby, glancing proudly at her daughter.

"Oh! of course," said Miss Knag.

"And will improve still more," added Mrs. Nickleby.

"That she will, I'll be bound," replied Miss Knag, squeezing Kate's arm in her own, to point the joke.

"She always was clever," said poor Mrs. Nickleby, brightening up, "always, from a baby. I recollect, when she was only two years and a half old, that a gentleman who used to visit very much at our house—Mr. Watkins, you know, Kate, my dear, that your poor papa went bail for, who afterwards ran away to the United States, and sent us a pair of snow shoes, with such an affectionate letter that it made your poor dear father cry for a week. You remember the letter? In which he said that he was very sorry he couldn't repay the fifty pounds just then, because his capital was all out at interest, and he was very busy making his fortune, but that he didn't forget you were his god-daughter, and he should take it very unkind if we didn't buy you a silver coral, and put it down to his old account? Dear me, yes, my dear, how stupid you are! and spoke so affectionately of the old port wine that he used to drink a bottle and a half of every time he came. You must remember, Kate?"

"Yes, yes, mamma; what of him?"

"Why, that Mr. Watkins, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby slowly, as if she were making a tremendous effort to recollect something of paramount importance; "that Mr. Watkins—he wasn't any relation, Miss Knag will understand, to the Watkins who kept the Old Boar in the village; by-the-bye, I don't remember whether it was the Old Boar or the George the Third, but it was one of the two, I know, and it's much the same—that Mr. Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards."

Having quoted this extraordinary and most disinterested testimony to her daughter's excellence, Mrs. Nickleby stopped to breathe; and Miss Knag, finding that the discourse was turning upon family greatness, lost no time in striking in with a small reminiscence on her own account.

"Don't talk of lending money, Mrs. Nickleby," said Miss Knag, "or you'll drive me crazy, perfectly crazy. My mamma—hem!—was the most lovely and beautiful creature, with the most striking and exquisite—hem!—the most exquisite nose that ever was put upon a human face, I do believe, Mrs. Nickleby (here Miss Knag rubbed her own nose sympathetically); the most delightful and accomplished woman, perhaps, that ever was seen; but she had that one failing of lending money, and carried it to such an extent that she lent—hem!—oh! thousands of pounds, all our little fortunes, and what's more, Mrs. Nickleby, I don't think, if we were to live till—till—hem!—till the very end of time, that we should ever get them back again. I don't indeed."

After concluding this effort of invention without being interrupted, Miss Knag fell into

many more recollections, no less interesting than true, the full tide of which, Mrs. Nickleby in vain attempting to stem, at length sailed smoothly down, by adding an under-current of her own recollections; and so both ladies went on talking together in perfect contentment; the only difference between them being, that whereas Miss Knag addressed herself to Kate, and talked very loud, Mrs. Nickleby kept on in one unbroken monotonous flow, perfectly satisfied to be talking, and caring very little whether anybody listened or not.

In this manner they walked on, very amicably, until they arrived at Miss Knag's brother's, who was an ornamental stationer and small circulating-library keeper in a by-street off Tottenham Court Road: and who let out by the day, week, month, or year, the newest old novels, whereof the titles were displayed in pen-and-ink characters on a sheet of pasteboard, swinging at his door-post. As Miss Knag happened, at the moment, to be in the middle of an account of her twenty-second offer from a gentleman of large property, she insisted upon their all going in to supper together; and in they went.

"Don't go away, Mortimer," said Miss Knag as they entered the shop. "It's only one of our young ladies and her mother. Mrs. and Miss Nickleby."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Mortimer Knag. "Ah!"

Having given utterance to these ejaculations with a very profound and thoughtful air, Mr. Knag slowly snuffed two kitchen candles on the counter, and two more in the window, and then snuffed himself from a box in his waistcoat pocket.

There was something very impressive in the ghostly air with which all this was done; and, as Mr. Knag was a tall lank gentleman of solemn features, wearing spectacles, and garnished with much less hair than a gentleman bordering on forty, or thereabouts, usually boasts, Mrs. Nickleby whispered her daughter that she thought he must be literary.

"Past ten," said Mr. Knag, consulting his watch. "Thomas, close the warehouse."

Thomas was a boy nearly half as tall as a shutter, and the warehouse was a shop about the size of three hackney coaches.

"Ah!" said Mr. Knag once more, heaving a deep sigh as he restored to its parent shelf the book he had been reading. "Well—yes—I believe supper is ready, sister."

With another sigh Mr. Knag took up the kitchen candles from the counter, and preceded the ladies with mournful steps to a back-parlour, where a charwoman, employed in the absence of the sick servant, and remunerated with certain eighteen-pences to be deducted from her wages due, was putting the supper out.

"Mrs. Blockson," said Miss Knag reproachfully, "how very often I have begged you not to come into the room with your bonnet on!"

"I can't help it, Miss Knag," said the charwoman, bridling up on the shortest notice. "There's been a deal o' cleaning to do in this house, and if you don't like it, I must trouble you to look out for somebody else, for it don't hardly pay me, and that's the truth, if I was to be hung this minute."

"I don't want any remarks if *you* please," said Miss Knag with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun. "Is there any fire down-stairs for some hot water presently?"

"No, there is not, indeed, Miss Knag," replied the substitute; "and so I won't tell you no stories about it."

"Then why isn't there?" said Miss Knag.

"Because there aren't no coals left out, and if I could make coals I would, but as I can't I won't, and so I make bold to tell you, mem," replied Mrs. Blockson.

"Will you hold your tongue—female?" said Mr. Mortimer Knag, plunging violently into this dialogue.

"By your leave, Mr. Knag," retorted the charwoman, turning sharp round, "I'm only too glad not to speak in this house, excepting when and where I'm spoke to, sir; and with regard to being a female, sir, I should wish to know what you considered yourself?"

"A miserable wretch," exclaimed Mr. Knag, striking his forehead. "A miserable wretch."

"I'm very glad to find that you don't call yourself out of your name, sir," said Mrs. Blockson; "and, as I had two twin children the day before yesterday was only seven weeks, and my little Charley fell down a airy, and put his elber out, last Monday, I shall take it as a favour if you'll send nine shillings, for one week's work, to my house, afore the clock strikes ten tomorrow."

With these parting words, the good woman quitted the room with great ease of manner, leaving the door wide open; Mr. Knag, at the same moment, flung himself into the "warehouse," and groaned aloud.

"What is the matter with that gentleman, pray?" inquired Mrs. Nickleby, greatly disturbed by the sound.

"Is he ill?" inquired Kate, really alarmed.

"Hush!" replied Miss Knag; "a most

melancholy history. He was once most devotedly attached to—hem!—to Madame Mantalini."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby.

"Yes," continued Miss Knag, "and received great encouragement too, and confidently hoped to marry her. He has a most romantic heart, Mrs. Nickleby, as indeed—hem!—as indeed all our family have, and the disappointment was a dreadful blow. He is a wonderfully accomplished man—most extraordinarily accomplished—reads—hem!—reads every novel that comes out; I mean every novel that—hem!—that has any fashion in it, of course. The fact is, that he did find so much in the books he read applicable to his own misfortunes, and did find himself in every respect so much like the heroes—because, of course, he is conscious of his own superiority, as we all are, and very naturally—that he took to scorning everything, and became a genius; and I am quite sure that he is, at this very present moment, writing another book."

"Another book!" repeated Kate, finding that a pause was left for somebody to say something.

"Yes," said Miss Knag, nodding in great

"A MISERABLE WRETCH," EXCLAIMED MR. KNAG, STRIKING HIS FOREHEAD. "A MISERABLE WRETCH."

triumph; "another book, in three volumes post octavo. Of course, it's a great advantage to him, in all his little fashionable descriptions, to have the benefit of my—hem!—of my experience, because, of course, few authors who write about such things can have such opportunities of knowing them as I have. He's so wrapped up in high life, that the least allusion to business or worldly matters—like that woman just now, for instance—quite distracts him; but, as I often say, I think his disappointment a great thing for him, because, if he hadn't been disappointed, he couldn't have written about blighted hopes and all that; and the fact is, if it hadn't happened as it has, I don't believe his genius would ever have come out at all."

How much more communicative Miss Knag might have become under more favourable circumstances, it is impossible to divine, but, as the gloomy one was within ear-shot, and the fire wanted making up, her disclosures stopped here. To judge from all appearances, and the difficulty of making the water warm, the last servant could not have been much accustomed to any other fire than St. Anthony's; but a little brandy-and-water was made at last, and the guests, having

been previously regaled with cold leg of mutton and bread and cheese, soon afterwards took leave; Kate amusing herself, all the way home, with the recollection of her last glimpse of Mr. Mortimer Knag deeply abstracted in the shop; and Mrs. Nickleby by debating within herself whether the dressmaking firm would ultimately become "Mantalini, Knag, and Nickleby," or "Mantalini, Nickleby, and Knag."

At this high point Miss Knag's friendship remained for three whole days, much to the wonderment of Madame Mantalini's young ladies, who had never beheld such constancy in that quarter before; but, on the fourth, it received a check no less violent than sudden, which thus occurred.

It happened that an old lord of great family, who was going to marry a young lady of no family in particular, came with the young lady, and the young lady's sister, to witness the ceremony of trying on two nuptial bonnets which had been ordered the day before, and Madame Mantalini announcing the fact, in a shrill treble, through the speaking-pipe, which communicated with the workroom, Miss Knag darted hastily up-stairs with a bonnet in each hand, and presented herself in the show-room, in a charming state of palpitation, intended to demonstrate her enthusiasm in the cause. The bonnets were no sooner fairly on than Miss Knag and Madame Mantalini fell into convulsions of admiration.

"A most elegant appearance," said Madame Mantalini.

"I never saw anything so exquisite in all my life," said Miss Knag.

Now, the old lord, who was a *very* old lord, said nothing, but mumbled and chuckled in a state of great delight, no less with the nuptial bonnets and their wearers than with his own address in getting such a fine woman for his wife; and the young lady, who was a very lively young lady, seeing the old lord in this rapturous condition, chased the old lord behind a cheval-glass, and then and there kissed him, while Madame Mantalini and the other young lady looked, discreetly, another way.

But, pending the salutation, Miss Knag, who was tinged with curiosity, stepped accidentally behind the glass, and encountered the lively young lady's eye just at the very moment when she kissed the old lord; upon which the young lady, in a pouting manner, murmured something about "an old thing," and "great impertinence," and finished by darting a look of displeasure at Miss Knag, and smiling contemptuously.

"Madame Mantalini," said the young lady.

"Ma'am," said Madame Mantalini.

"Pray have up that pretty young creature we saw yesterday."

"Oh yes, do!" said the sister.

"Of all things in the world, Madame Mantalini," said the lord's intended, throwing herself languidly on a sofa, "I hate being waited upon by frights or elderly persons. Let me always see that young creature, I beg, whenever I come."

"By all means," said the old lord; "the lovely young creature, by all means."

"Everybody is talking about her," said the young lady in the same careless manner; "and my lord, being a great admirer of beauty, must positively see her."

"She *is* universally admired," replied Madame Mantalini. "Miss Knag, send up Miss Nickleby. You needn't return."

"I beg your pardon, Madame Mantalini, what did you say last?" asked Miss Knag, trembling.

"You needn't return," repeated the superior sharply. Miss Knag vanished without another word, and in all reasonable time was replaced by Kate, who took off the new bonnets and put on the old ones: blushing very much to find that the old lord and the two young ladies were staring her out of countenance all the time.

"Why, how you colour, child!" said the lord's chosen bride.

"She is not quite so accustomed to her business as she will be in a week or two," interposed Madame Mantalini with a gracious smile.

"I am afraid you have been giving her some of your wicked looks, my lord," said the intended.

"No, no, no," replied the old lord, "no, no, I'm going to be married, and lead a new life. Ha, ha, ha! a new life, a new life! ha, ha, ha!"

It was a satisfactory thing to hear that the old gentleman was going to lead a new life, for it was pretty evident that his old one would not last him much longer. The mere exertion of protracted chuckling reduced him to a fearful ebb of coughing and gasping; it was some minutes before he could find breath to remark that the girl was too pretty for a milliner.

"I hope you don't think good looks a disqualification for the business, my lord," said Madame Mantalini, simpering.

"Not by any means," replied the old lord, "or you would have left it long ago."

"You naughty creature!" said the lively lady, poking the peer with her parasol; "I won't have you talk so. How dare you?"

This playful inquiry was accompanied with another poke, and another, and then the old

lord caught the parasol, and wouldn't give it up again, which induced the other lady to come to the rescue, and some very pretty sportiveness ensued.

"You will see that those little alterations are made, Madame Mantalini," said the lady. "Nay, you bad man, you positively shall go first; I wouldn't leave you behind with that pretty girl, not for half a second. I know you too well. Jane, my dear, let him go first, and we shall be quite sure of him."

The old lord, evidently much flattered by this suspicion, bestowed a grotesque leer upon Kate as he passed; and, receiving another tap with the parasol for his wickedness, tottered down-stairs to the door, where his sprightly body was hoisted into the carriage by two stout footmen.

"Foh!" said Madame Mantalini, "how he ever gets into a carriage without thinking of a hearse, *I* can't think. There, take the things away, my dear, take them away."

Kate, who had remained during the whole scene with her eyes modestly fixed upon the ground, was only too happy to avail herself of the permission to retire, and hasten joyfully down-stairs to Miss Knag's dominion.

The circumstances of the little kingdom had greatly changed, however, during the short period of her absence. In place of Miss Knag being stationed in her accustomed seat, preserving all the dignity and greatness of Madame Mantalini's representative, that worthy soul was reposing on a large box, bathed in tears, while three or four of the young ladies in close attendance upon her, together with the presence of hartshorn, vinegar, and other restoratives, would have borne ample testimony, even without the derangement of the head-dress and front row of curls, to her having fainted desperately.

"Bless me!" said Kate, stepping hastily forward, "what is the matter?"

This inquiry produced in Miss Knag violent symptoms of a relapse; and several young ladies, darting angry looks at Kate, applied more vinegar and hartshorn, and said it was "a shame."

"What is a shame?" demanded Kate. "What is the matter? What has happened? Tell me."

"Matter!" cried Miss Knag, coming, all at once, bolt upright, to the great consternation of the assembled maidens; "matter! Fie upon you, you nasty creature!"

"Gracious!" cried Kate, almost paralysed by the violence with which the adjective had been jerked out from between Miss Knag's closed teeth; "have *I* offended you?"

"*You* offended me!" retorted Miss Knag, "*you!* a chit, a child, an upstart nobody! Oh, indeed! Ha, ha!"

Now, it was evident, as Miss Knag laughed, that something struck her as being exceedingly funny; and as the young ladies took their tone from Miss Knag—she being the chief—they all got up a laugh without a moment's delay, and nodded their heads a little, and smiled sarcastically to each other, as much as to say, how very good that was!

"Here she is," continued Miss Knag, getting off the box, and introducing Kate with much ceremony and many low curtsies to the delighted throng; "here she is—everybody is talking about her—the belle, ladies—the beauty, the—oh, you bold-faced thing!"

At this crisis Miss Knag was unable to repress a virtuous shudder, which immediately communicated itself to all the young ladies; after which Miss Knag laughed, and, after that, cried.

"For fifteen years," exclaimed Miss Knag, sobbing in a most affecting manner, "for fifteen years have I been the credit and ornament of this room and the one up-stairs. Thank God," said Miss Knag, stamping first her right foot and then her left with remarkable energy, "I have never in all that time, till now, been exposed to the arts, the vile arts, of a creature who disgraces us with all her proceedings, and makes proper people blush for themselves. But I feel it, I do feel it, although I am disgusted."

Miss Knag here relapsed into softness, and the young ladies, renewing their attentions, murmured that she ought to be superior to such things, and that, for their part, they despised them, and considered them beneath their notice; in witness whereof they called out, more emphatically than before, that it was a shame, and that they felt so angry, they did, they hardly knew what to do with themselves.

"Have I lived to this day to be called a fright?" cried Miss Knag, suddenly becoming convulsive, and making an effort to tear her front off.

"Oh no, no!" replied the chorus, "pray don't say so; don't, now!"

"Have I deserved to be called an elderly person?" screamed Miss Knag, wrestling with the supernumeraries.

"Don't think of such things, dear," answered the chorus.

"I hate her," cried Miss Knag; "I detest and hate her. Never let her speak to me again; never let anybody who is a friend of mine speak to her; a slut, a hussy, an impudent artful hussy!" Having denounced the object of her wrath in these terms, Miss Knag screamed once,

hiccuped thrice, gurgled in her throat several times, slumbered, shivered, woke, came to, composed her head-dress, and declared herself quite well again.

Poor Kate had regarded these proceedings, at first, in perfect bewilderment. She had then turned red and pale by turns, and once or twice essayed to speak; but, as the true motives of this altered behaviour developed themselves, she retired a few paces, and looked calmly on without deigning a reply. Nevertheless, although she walked proudly to her seat, and turned her back upon the group of little satellites who clustered round their ruling planet in the remotest corner of the room, she gave way, in secret, to some such bitter tears as would have gladdened Miss Knag's inmost soul, if she could have seen them fall.

CHAPTER XIX.

DESCRIPTIVE OF A DINNER AT MR. RALPH NICKLEBY'S, AND OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE COMPANY ENTERTAINED THEMSELVES BEFORE DINNER, AT DINNER, AND AFTER DINNER.

THE bile and rancour of the worthy Miss Knag undergoing no diminution during the remainder of the week, but rather augmenting with every successive hour; and the honest ire of all the young ladies rising, or seeming to rise, in exact proportion to the good spinster's indignation, and both waxing very hot every time Miss Nickleby was called up-stairs; it will be readily imagined that that young lady's daily life was none of the most cheerful or enviable kind. She hailed the arrival of Saturday night as a prisoner would a few delicious hours' respite from slow and wearing torture, and felt that the poor pittance for her first week's labour would have been dearly and hardly earned, had its amount been trebled.

When she joined her mother, as usual, at the street corner, she was not a little surprised to find her in conversation with Mr. Ralph Nickleby; but her surprise was soon redoubled, no less by the matter of their conversation than by the smoothed and altered manner of Mr. Nickleby himself.

"Ah, my dear!" said Ralph; "we were at that moment talking about you."

"Indeed!" replied Kate, shrinking, though she scarce knew why, from her uncle's cold glistening eye.

"That instant," said Ralph. "I was coming to call for you, making sure to catch you before you left; but your mother and I have been talking over family affairs, and the time has slipped away so rapidly——"

"Well, now, hasn't it?" interposed Mrs. Nickleby, quite insensible to the sarcastic tone of Ralph's last remark. "Upon my word, I couldn't have believed it possible that such a—— Kate, my dear, you're to dine with your uncle at half-past six o'clock to-morrow."

Triumphing in having been the first to communicate this extraordinary intelligence, Mrs. Nickleby nodded and smiled a great many times, to impress its full magnificence on Kate's wondering mind, and then flew off, at an acute angle, to a committee of ways and means.

"Let me see," said the good lady. "Your black silk frock will be quite dress enough, my dear, with that pretty little scarf, and a plain band in your hair, and a pair of black silk stock—— Dear, dear," cried Mrs. Nickleby, flying off at another angle, "if I had but those unfortunate amethysts of mine—you recollect them, Kate, my love—how they used to sparkle, you know—but your papa, your poor dear papa—ah! there never was anything so cruelly sacrificed as those jewels were, never!" Overpowered by this agonising thought, Mrs. Nickleby shook her head in a melancholy manner, and applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I don't want them, mamma, indeed," said Kate. "Forget that you ever had them."

"Lord, Kate, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby pettishly, "how like a child you talk! Four-and-twenty silver tea-spoons, brother-in-law, two gravies, four salts, all the amethysts—necklace, brooch, and ear-rings—all made away with at the same time, and I saying, almost on my bended knees to that poor good soul, 'Why don't you do something, Nicholas? Why don't you make some arrangement?' I am sure that anybody who was about us at that time will do me the justice to own, that if I said that once, I said it fifty times a day. Didn't I, Kate, my dear? Did I ever lose an opportunity of impressing it on your poor papa?"

"No, no, mamma, never," replied Kate. And, to do Mrs. Nickleby justice, she never had lost—and, to do married ladies as a body justice, they seldom do lose—any occasion of inculcating similar golden precepts, whose only blemish is, the slight degree of vagueness and uncertainty in which they are usually enveloped.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Nickleby with great fervour, "if my advice had been taken at the beginning—— Well, I have always done *my* duty, and that's some comfort."

When she had arrived at this reflection, Mrs. Nickleby sighed, rubbed her hands, cast up her eyes, and finally assumed a look of meek composure; thus importing that she was a persecuted saint, but that she wouldn't trouble her hearers by mentioning a circumstance which must be so obvious to everybody.

"Now," said Ralph with a smile, which, in common with all other tokens of emotion, seemed to skulk under his face, rather than play boldly over it—"to return to the point from which we have strayed. I have a little party of—of—gentlemen with whom I am connected in business just now, at my house to-morrow; and your mother has promised that you shall keep house for me. I am not much used to parties; but this is one of business, and such fooleries are an important part of it sometimes. You don't mind obliging me?"

"Mind!" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "My dear Kate, why——"

"I AM AFRAID YOU HAVE BEEN GIVING HER SOME OF YOUR WICKED LOOKS, MY LORD," SAID THE INTENDED.

"Pray," interrupted Ralph, motioning her to be silent. "I spoke to my niece."

"I shall be very glad, of course, uncle," replied Kate; "but I am afraid you will find me awkward and embarrassed."

"Oh no!" said Ralph; "come when you like, in a hackney coach—I'll pay for it. Good night—a—a—God bless you!"

The blessing seemed to stick in Mr. Ralph Nickleby's throat, as if it were not used to the thoroughfare, and didn't know the way out. But it got out somehow, though awkwardly enough; and, having disposed of it, he shook hands with his two relatives, and abruptly left them.

"What a very strongly-marked countenance your uncle has!" said Mrs. Nickleby, quite struck with his parting look. "I don't see the slightest resemblance to his poor brother."

"Mamma!" said Kate reprovingly. "To think of such a thing!"

"No," said Mrs. Nickleby, musing. "There certainly is none. But it's a very honest face."

The worthy matron made this remark with great emphasis and elocution, as if it comprised no small quantity of ingenuity and research; and, in truth, it was not unworthy of being classed among the extraordinary discoveries of the age. Kate looked up hastily, and as hastily looked down again.

"What has come over you, my dear, in the name of goodness?" asked Mrs. Nickleby when they had walked on, for some time, in silence.

"I was only thinking, mamma," answered Kate.

"Thinking!" repeated Mrs. Nickleby. "Ay, and indeed plenty to think about, too. Your uncle has taken a strong fancy to you, that's quite clear; and, if some extraordinary good fortune doesn't come to you after this, I shall be a little surprised, that's all."

With this she launched out into sundry anecdotes of young ladies who had had thousand-pound notes given them in reticules by eccentric uncles; and of young ladies who had accidentally met amiable gentlemen of enormous wealth at their uncles' houses, and married them, after short but ardent courtships; and Kate, listening first in apathy, and afterwards in amusement, felt, as they walked home, something of her mother's sanguine complexion gradually awakening in her own bosom, and began to think that her prospects might be brightening, and that better days might be dawning upon them. Such is hope, Heaven's own gift to struggling mortals; pervading, like some subtle essence from the skies, all things, both good and bad; as universal as death, and more infectious than disease!

The feeble winter's sun—and winter's suns in the City are very feeble indeed—might have brightened up, as he shone through the dim windows of the large old house, on witnessing the unusual sight which one half-furnished room displayed. In a gloomy corner, where, for years, had stood a silent dusty pile of merchandise, sheltering its colony of mice, and frowning, a dull and lifeless mass, upon the panelled room, save when, responding to the roll of heavy waggons in the street without, it quaked with sturdy tremblings, and caused the bright eyes of its tiny citizens to grow brighter still with fear, and struck them motionless, with attentive ear and palpitating heart, until the alarm had passed away—in this dark corner was arranged, with scrupulous care, all Kate's little finery for the day; each article of dress partaking of that indescribable air of jauntiness and individuality which empty garments—whether by association, or that they become moulded, as it were, to the owner's form—will take, in eyes accustomed to, or picturing, the wearer's smartness. In place of a bale of musty goods, there lay the black silk dress: the neatest possible figure in itself. The small shoes, with toes delicately turned out, stood upon the very pressure of some old iron weight; and a pile of harsh discoloured leather had unconsciously given place to the very same little pair of black silk stockings, which had been the objects of Mrs. Nickleby's peculiar care. Rats and mice, and such small gear, had long ago been starved, or had emigrated to better quarters: and, in their stead, appeared gloves, bands, scarfs, hair-pins, and many other little devices, almost as ingenious in their way as rats and mice themselves, for the tantalisation of mankind. About and among them all moved Kate herself, not the least beautiful or unwonted relief to the stern, old, gloomy building.

In good time, or in bad time, as the reader likes to take it—for Mrs. Nickleby's impatience went a great deal faster than the clocks at that end of the town, and Kate was dressed to the very last hair-pin a full hour and a half before it was at all necessary to begin to think about it—in good time, or in bad time, the toilet was completed; and it being at length the hour agreed upon for starting, the milkman fetched a coach from the nearest stand, and Kate, with many adieux to her mother, and many kind messages to Miss La Creevy, who was to come to tea, seated herself in it, and went away in state, if ever anybody went away in state in a hackney coach yet. And the coach, and the coachman, and the horses rattled, and jangled, and whipped, and cursed, and swore, and tumbled on together, until they came to Golden Square.

The coachman gave a tremendous double knock at the door, which was opened long before he had done, as quickly as if there had been a man behind it, with his hand tied to the latch. Kate, who had expected no more uncommon appearance than Newman Noggs in a clean shirt, was not a little astonished to see that the opener was a man in handsome livery, and that there were two or three others in the hall. There was no doubt about its being the right house, however, for there was the name upon the door; so she accepted the laced coat-sleeve which was tendered her, and, entering the house, was ushered up-stairs into a back drawing-room, where she was left alone.

If she had been surprised at the apparition of the footman, she was perfectly absorbed in amazement at the richness and splendour of the furniture. The softest and most elegant

carpets, the most exquisite pictures, the costliest mirrors; articles of richest ornament, quite dazzling from their beauty, and perplexing from the prodigality with which they were scattered around; encountered her on every side. The very staircase, nearly down to the hall-door, was crammed with beautiful and luxurious things, as though the house were brimful of riches, which, with a very trifling addition, would fairly run over into the street.

Presently she heard a series of loud double knocks at the street-door, and after every knock some new voice in the next room. The tones of Mr. Ralph Nickleby were easily distinguishable at first, but by degrees they merged into the general buzz of conversation, and all she could ascertain was, that there were several gentlemen with no very musical voices, who talked very loud, laughed very heartily, and swore more than she would have thought quite necessary. But this was a question of taste.

At length the door opened, and Ralph himself, divested of his boots, and ceremoniously embellished with black silks and shoes, presented his crafty face.

"I couldn't see you before, my dear," he said in a low tone, and pointing, as he spoke, to the next room. "I was engaged in receiving them. Now—shall I take you in?"

"Pray, uncle," said Kate, a little flurried, as people much more conversant with society often are when they are about to enter a room full of strangers, and have had time to think of it previously, "are there any ladies here?"

"No," said Ralph, shortly; "I don't know any."

"Must I go in immediately?" asked Kate, drawing back a little.

"As you please," said Ralph, shrugging his shoulders. "They are all come, and dinner will be announced directly afterwards—that's all."

Kate would have entreated a few minutes' respite, but reflecting that her uncle might consider the payment of the hackney-coach fare a sort of bargain for her punctuality, she suffered him to draw her arm through his, and to lead her away.

Seven or eight gentlemen were standing round the fire when they went in, and, as they were talking very loud, were not aware of their entrance until Mr. Ralph Nickleby, touching one on the coat-sleeve, said in a harsh emphatic voice, as if to attract general attention—

"Lord Frederick Verisopht, my niece, Miss Nickleby."

The group dispersed, as if in great surprise, and the gentleman addressed, turning round, exhibited a suit of clothes of the most superlative cut, a pair of whiskers of similar quality, a moustache, a head of hair, and a young face.

"Eh?" said the gentleman. "What—the—deyvle!"

With which broken ejaculations, he fixed his glass in his eye, and stared at Miss Nickleby in great surprise.

"My niece, my lord," said Ralph.

"Then my ears did not deceive me, and it's not wa-a-x-work," said his lordship. "How de do? I'm very happy." And then his lordship turned to another superlative gentleman, something older, something stouter, something redder in the face, and something longer upon town, and said in a loud whisper that the girl was "deyvlish pitty."

"Introduce me, Nickleby," said this second gentleman, who was lounging with his back to the fire, and both elbows on the chimney-piece.

"Sir Mulberry Hawk," said Ralph.

"Otherwise the most knowing card in the pa-ack, Miss Nickleby," said Lord Frederick Verisopht.

"Don't leave me out, Nickleby," cried a sharp-faced gentleman, who was sitting on a low chair with a high back, reading the paper.

"Mr. Pyke," said Ralph.

"Nor me, Nickleby," cried a gentleman with a flushed face and a flash air, from the elbow of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"Mr. Pluck," said Ralph. Then, wheeling about again towards a gentleman with the neck of a stork and the legs of no animal in particular, Ralph introduced him as the Honourable Mr. Snobb; and a white-headed person at the table as Colonel Chowser. The colonel was in conversation with somebody, who appeared to be a make-weight, and was not introduced at all.

There were two circumstances which, in this early stage of the party, struck home to Kate's bosom, and brought the blood tingling to her face. One was the flippant contempt with which the guests evidently regarded her uncle, and the other, the easy insolence of their manner towards herself. That the first symptom was very likely to lead to the aggravation of the second, it needed no great penetration to foresee. And here Mr. Ralph Nickleby had reckoned without his host; for, however fresh from the country a young lady (by nature) may be, and however unacquainted with conventional behaviour, the chances are that she will have

quite as strong an innate sense of the decencies and proprieties of life as if she had run the gauntlet of a dozen London seasons—possibly a stronger one, for such senses have been known to blunt in this improving process.

When Ralph had completed the ceremonial of introduction, he led his blushing niece to a seat. As he did so, he glanced warily round, as though to assure himself of the impression which her unlooked-for appearance had created.

"An unexpected playsure, Nickleby," said Lord Frederick Verisopht, taking his glass out of his right eye, where it had, until now, done duty on Kate, and fixing it in his left, to bring it to bear on Ralph.

"Designed to surprise you, Lord Frederick," said Mr. Pluck.

"Not a bad idea," said his lordship, "and one that would almost warrant the addition of an extra two and a half per cent."

"Nickleby," said Sir Mulberry Hawk in a thick coarse voice, "take the hint, and tack it on to the other five-and-twenty, or whatever it is, and give me half for the advice."

Sir Mulberry garnished this speech with a hoarse laugh, and terminated it with a pleasant oath regarding Mr. Nickleby's limbs, whereat Messrs. Pyke and Pluck laughed consumedly.

These gentlemen had not yet quite recovered the jest when dinner was announced, and then they were thrown into fresh ecstasies by a similar cause; for Sir Mulberry Hawk, in an excess of humour, shot dexterously past Lord Frederick Verisopht, who was about to lead Kate down-stairs, and drew her arm through his up to the elbow.

"No, damn it, Verisopht," said Sir Mulberry, "fair play's a jewel, and Miss Nickleby and I settled the matter with our eyes ten minutes ago."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Honourable Mr. Snobb, "very good, very good."

Rendered additionally witty by this applause, Sir Mulberry Hawk leered upon his friends most facetiously, and led Kate down-stairs with an air of familiarity, which roused in her gentle breast such burning indignation as she felt it almost impossible to repress. Nor was the intensity of these feelings at all diminished when she found herself placed at the top of the table, with Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Frederick Verisopht on either side.

"Oh! you've found your way into our neighbourhood, have you?" said Sir Mulberry as his lordship sat down.

"Of course," replied Lord Frederick, fixing his eyes on Miss Nickleby; "how can you a-ask me?"

"Well, you attend to your dinner," said Sir Mulberry, "and don't mind Miss Nickleby and me, for we shall prove very indifferent company, I dare say."

"I wish you'd interfere here, Nickleby," said Lord Frederick.

"What is the matter, my lord?" demanded Ralph from the bottom of the table, where he was supported by Messrs. Pyke and Pluck.

"This fellow, Hawk, is monopolising your niece," said Lord Frederick.

"He has a tolerable share of everything that you lay claim to, my lord," said Ralph with a sneer.

"'Gad, so he has," replied the young man; "deyvle take me if I know which is master in my house, he or I."

"*I* know," muttered Ralph.

"I think I shall cut him off with a shilling," said the young nobleman jocosely.

"No, no, curse it!" said Sir Mulberry. "When you come to the shilling—the last shilling—I'll cut you fast enough; but, till then, I'll never leave you—you may take your oath of it."

This sally (which was strictly founded on fact) was received with a general roar, above which was plainly distinguishable the laughter of Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, who were evidently Sir Mulberry's toads in ordinary. Indeed, it was not difficult to see that the majority of the company preyed upon the unfortunate young lord, who, weak and silly as he was, appeared by far the least vicious of the party. Sir Mulberry Hawk was remarkable for his tact in ruining, by himself and his creatures, young gentlemen of fortune—a genteel and elegant profession, of which he had undoubtedly gained the head. With all the boldness of an original genius, he had struck out an entirely new course of treatment, quite opposed to the usual method; his custom being, when he had gained the ascendancy over those he took in hand, rather to keep them down than to give them their own way; and to exercise his vivacity upon them openly, and without reserve. Thus, he made them butts in a double sense, and, while he emptied them with great address, caused them to ring with sundry well-administered taps, for the diversion of society.

The dinner was as remarkable for the splendour and completeness of its appointments as the mansion itself, and the company were remarkable for doing it ample justice, in which respect Messrs. Pyke and Pluck particularly signalised themselves; these two gentlemen eating of every dish, and drinking of every bottle, with a capa-

city and perseverance truly astonishing. They were remarkably fresh, too, notwithstanding their great exertions: for, on the appearance of the dessert, they broke out again, as if nothing serious had taken place since breakfast.

"Well," said Lord Frederick, sipping his first glass of port, "if this is a discounting dinner, all I have to say is, deyvle take me if it wouldn't be a good pla-an to get discount every day."

"You'll have plenty of it in your time," returned Sir Mulberry Hawk; "Nickleby will tell you that."

"What do you say, Nickleby?" inquired the young man; "am I to be a good customer?"

"It depends entirely on circumstances, my lord," replied Ralph.

"On your lordship's circumstances," interposed Colonel Chowser of the Militia—"and the race-courses."

The gallant colonel glanced at Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, as if he thought they ought to laugh at his joke; but those gentlemen, being only engaged to laugh for Sir Mulberry Hawk, were, to his signal discomfiture, as grave as a pair of undertakers. To add to his defeat, Sir Mulberry, considering any such efforts an invasion of his peculiar privilege, eyed the offender steadily through his glass, as if astonished at his presumption, and audibly stated his impression that it was an "infernal liberty," which being a hint to Lord Frederick, he put up *his* glass, and surveyed the object of censure as if he were some extraordinary wild animal then exhibiting for the first time. As a matter of course, Messrs. Pyke and Pluck stared at the individual whom Sir Mulberry Hawk stared at; so, the poor colonel, to hide his confusion, was reduced to the necessity of holding his port before his right eye, and affecting to scrutinise its colour with the most lively interest.

All this while Kate had sat as silently as she could, scarcely daring to raise her eyes, lest they should encounter the admiring gaze of Lord Frederick Verisopht, or, what was still more embarrassing, the bold looks of his friend Sir Mulberry. The latter gentleman was obliging enough to direct general attention towards her.

"Here is Miss Nickleby," observed Sir Mulberry, "wondering why the deuce somebody doesn't make love to her."

"No, indeed," said Kate, looking hastily up, "I——" and then she stopped, feeling it would have been better to have said nothing at all.

"I'll hold any man fifty pounds," said Sir Mulberry, "that Miss Nickleby can't look in my face, and tell me she wasn't thinking so."

"Done!" cried the noble gull. "Within ten minutes."

"Done!" responded Sir Mulberry. The money was produced on both sides, and the Honourable Mr. Snobb was elected to the double office of stake-holder and time-keeper.

"Pray," said Kate, in great confusion, while these preliminaries were in course of completion, "pray do not make me the subject of any bets. Uncle, I cannot really——"

"Why not, my dear?" replied Ralph, in whose grating voice, however, there was an unusual huskiness, as though he spoke unwillingly, and would rather that the proposition had not been broached. "It is done in a moment; there is nothing in it. If the gentlemen insist on it——"

"*I* don't insist on it," said Sir Mulberry with a loud laugh. "That is, I by no means insist upon Miss Nickleby's making the denial, for, if she does, I lose; but I shall be glad to see her bright eyes, especially as she favours the mahogany so much."

"So she does, and it's too ba-a-d of you, Miss Nickleby," said the noble youth.

"Quite cruel," said Mr. Pyke.

"Horrid cruel," said Mr. Pluck.

"I don't care if I do lose," said Sir Mulberry; "for one tolerable look at Miss Nickleby's eyes is worth double the money."

"More," said Mr. Pyke.

"Far more," said Mr. Pluck.

"How goes the enemy, Snobb?" asked Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"Four minutes gone."

"Bravo!"

"Won't you ma-ake one effort for me, Miss Nickleby?" asked Lord Frederick after a short interval.

"You needn't trouble yourself to inquire, my buck," said Sir Mulberry; "Miss Nickleby and I understand each other; she declares on my side, and shows her taste. You haven't a chance, old fellow. Time, Snobb?"

"Eight minutes gone."

"Get the money ready," said Sir Mulberry; "you'll soon hand over."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Pyke.

Mr. Pluck, who always came second, and topped his companion if he could, screamed outright.

The poor girl, who was so overwhelmed with confusion that she scarcely knew what she did, had determined to remain perfectly quiet; but fearing that by so doing she might seem to countenance Sir Mulberry's boast, which had been uttered with great coarseness and vulgarity

of manner, raised her eyes, and looked him in the face. There was something so odious, so insolent, so repulsive in the look which met her, that, without the power to stammer forth a syllable, she rose and hurried from the room. She restrained her tears by a great effort until she was alone up-stairs, and then gave them vent.

"Capital!" said Sir Mulberry Hawk, putting the stakes in his pocket. "That's a girl of spirit, and we'll drink her health."

It is needless to say that Pyke and Co. responded, with great warmth of manner, to this proposal, or that the toast was drunk with many little insinuations from the firm, relative to the completeness of Sir Mulberry's conquest. Ralph, who, while the attention of the other guests was attracted to the principals in the preceding scene, had eyed them like a wolf, appeared to breathe more freely now his niece was gone; the decanters passing quickly round, he leaned back in his chair, and turned his eyes from speaker to speaker, as they warmed with wine, with looks that seemed to search their hearts, and lay bare, for his distempered sport, every idle thought within them.

Meanwhile, Kate, left wholly to herself, had, in some degree, recovered her composure. She had learnt, from a female attendant, that her uncle wished to see her before she left, and had also gleaned the satisfactory intelligence that the gentlemen would take coffee at table. The prospect of seeing them no more contributed greatly to calm her agitation, and, taking up a book, she composed herself to read.

She started sometimes, when the sudden opening of the dining-room door let loose a wild shout of noisy revelry, and more than once rose in great alarm, as a fancied footstep on the staircase impressed her with the fear that some stray member of the party was returning alone. Nothing occurring, however, to realise her apprehensions, she endeavoured to fix her attention more closely on her book, in which by degrees she became so much interested, that she had read on through several chapters without heed of time or place, when she was terrified by suddenly hearing her name pronounced by a man's voice close at her ear.

The book fell from her hand. Lounging on an ottoman close beside her was Sir Mulberry Hawk, evidently the worse—if a man be a ruffian at heart, he is never the better—for wine.

"What a delightful studiousness!" said this accomplished gentleman. "Was it real, now, or only to display the eyelashes?"

Kate, looking anxiously towards the door, made no reply.

"I have looked at 'em for five minutes," said Sir Mulberry. "Upon my soul, they're perfect. Why did I speak, and destroy such a pretty little picture?"

"Do me the favour to be silent now, sir," replied Kate.

"No, don't," said Sir Mulberry, folding his crush hat to lay his elbow on, and bringing himself still closer to the young lady; "upon my life, you oughtn't to. Such a devoted slave of yours, Miss Nickleby—it's an infernal thing to treat him so harshly, upon my soul it is."

"I wish you to understand, sir," said Kate, trembling in spite of herself, but speaking with great indignation, "that your behaviour offends and disgusts me. If you have a spark of gentlemanly feeling remaining, you will leave me."

"Now, why," said Sir Mulberry, "why will you keep up this appearance of excessive rigour, my sweet creature? Now, be more natural—my dear Miss Nickleby, be more natural—do."

Kate hastily rose; but, as she rose, Sir Mulberry caught her dress, and forcibly detained her.

"Let me go, sir!" she cried, her heart swelling with anger. "Do you hear? Instantly—this moment!"

"Sit down, sit down," said Sir Mulberry; "I want to talk to you."

"Unhand me, sir, this instant!" cried Kate.

"Not for the world," rejoined Sir Mulberry. Thus speaking, he leaned over, as if to replace her in her chair; but the young lady making a violent effort to disengage herself, he lost his balance, and measured his length upon the ground. As Kate sprung forward to leave the room, Mr. Ralph Nickleby appeared in the doorway, and confronted her.

"What is this?" said Ralph.

"It is this, sir," replied Kate, violently agitated: "that beneath the roof where I, a helpless girl, your dead brother's child, should most have found protection, I have been exposed to insult which should make you shrink to look upon me. Let me pass you."

Ralph *did* shrink as the indignant girl fixed her kindling eye upon him; but he did not comply with her injunction, nevertheless: for he led her to a distant seat, and returning, and approaching Sir Mulberry Hawk, who had by this time risen, motioned towards the door.

"Your way lies there, sir," said Ralph in a suppressed voice, that some devil might have owned with pride.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded his friend fiercely.

The swollen veins stood out like sinews on

Ralph's wrinkled forehead, and the nerves about his mouth worked as though some unendurable emotion wrung them; but he smiled disdainfully, and again pointed to the door.

"Do you know me, you old madman?" asked Sir Mulberry.

"Well," said Ralph. The fashionable vagabond for the moment quite quailed under the steady look of the older sinner, and walked towards the door, muttering as he went.

"You wanted the lord, did you?" he said, stopping short when he reached the door, as if a new light had broken in upon him, and confronting Ralph again. "Damme, I was in the way, was I?"

Ralph smiled again, but made no answer.

"Who brought him to you first?" pursued Sir Mulberry; "and how, without me, could you ever have wound him in your net as you have?"

"The net is a large one, and rather full," said Ralph. "Take care that it chokes nobody in the meshes."

"You would sell your flesh and blood for money; yourself, if you have not already made a bargain with the devil," retorted the other. "Do you mean to tell me that your pretty niece was not brought here as a decoy for the drunken boy down-stairs?"

Although this hurried dialogue was carried on in a suppressed tone on both sides, Ralph looked involuntarily round to ascertain that Kate had not moved her position so as to be within hearing. His adversary saw the advantage he had gained, and followed it up.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked again, "that it is not so? Do you mean to say that if he had found his way up here instead of me, you wouldn't have been a little more blind, and a little more deaf, and a little less flourishing, than you have been? Come, Nickleby, answer me that."

"I tell you this," replied Ralph, "that if I brought her here as a matter of business——"

"Ay, that's the word," interposed Sir Mulberry with a laugh. "You're coming to yourself again now."

"—As a matter of business," pursued Ralph, speaking slowly and firmly, as a man who has made up his mind to say no more, "because I thought she might make some impression on the silly youth you have taken in hand, and are lending good help to ruin, I knew—knowing him—that it would be long before he outraged her girl's feelings, and that, unless he offended by mere puppyism and emptiness, he would, with a little management, respect the sex and conduct even of his usurer's niece. But, if I thought to draw him on more gently by this device, I did not think of subjecting the girl to the licentiousness and brutality of so old a hand as you. And now we understand each other."

"Especially as there was nothing to be got by it—eh?" sneered Sir Mulberry.

"Exactly so," said Ralph. He had turned away, and looked over his shoulder to make this last reply. The eyes of the two worthies met, with an expression as if each rascal felt that there was no disguising himself from the other; and Sir Mulberry Hawk shrugged his shoulders, and walked slowly out.

His friend closed the door, and looked restlessly towards the spot where his niece still remained in the attitude in which he had left her. She had flung herself heavily upon the couch, and, with her head drooping over the cushion, and her face hidden in her hands, seemed to be still weeping in an agony of shame and grief.

Ralph would have walked into any poverty-stricken debtor's house, and pointed him out to a bailiff, though in attendance upon a young child's death-bed, without the smallest concern, because it would have been a matter quite in the ordinary course of business, and the man would have been an offender against his only code of morality. But, here was a young girl, who had done no wrong save that of coming into the world alive; who had patiently yielded to all his wishes; who had tried hard to please him—above all, who didn't owe him money—and he felt awkward and nervous.

Ralph took a chair at some distance; then, another chair a little nearer; then, moved a little nearer still; then, nearer again; and finally sat himself on the same sofa, and laid his hand on Kate's arm.

"Hush, my dear!" he said as she drew it back, and her sobs burst out afresh. "Hush, hush! Don't mind it now; don't think of it."

"Oh, for pity's sake, let me go home!" cried Kate. "Let me leave this house, and go home."

"Yes, yes," said Ralph. "You shall. But you must dry your eyes first, and compose yourself. Let me raise your head. There—there!"

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Kate, clasping her hands. "What have I done—what have I done—that you should subject me to this? If I had wronged you in thought, or word, or deed, it would have been most cruel to me, and the memory of one you must have loved in some old time; but——"

"Only listen to me for a moment," interrupted Ralph, seriously alarmed by the violence

of her emotions. "I didn't know it would be so; it was impossible for me to foresee it. I did all I could.—Come, let us walk about. You are faint with the closeness of the room, and the heat of these lamps. You will be better now, if you make the slightest effort."

"I will do anything," replied Kate, "if you will only send me home."

"Well, well, I will," said Ralph; "but you must get back your own looks; for those you have will frighten them, and nobody must know of this but you and I. Now let us walk the other way. There! You look better even now."

With such encouragements as these, Ralph Nickleby walked to and fro, with his niece leaning on his arm; actually trembling beneath her touch.

In the same manner, when he judged it prudent to allow her to depart, he supported her

"BUT THE YOUNG LADY MAKING A VIOLENT EFFORT TO DISENGAGE HERSELF, HE LOST HIS BALANCE, AND MEASURED HIS LENGTH UPON THE GROUND."

down-stairs, after adjusting her shawl and performing such little offices, most probably for the first time in his life. Across the hall, and down the steps, Ralph led her, too; nor did he withdraw his hand until she was seated in the coach.

As the door of the vehicle was roughly closed, a comb fell from Kate's hair, close at her uncle's feet; and, as he picked it up, and returned it into her hand, the light from a neighbouring lamp shone upon her face. The lock of hair that had escaped and curled loosely over her brow, the traces of tears yet scarcely dry, the flushed cheek, the look of sorrow, all fired some dormant train of recollection in the old man's breast; and the face of his dead brother seemed present before him, with the very look it bore on some occasion of boyish grief, of which every minutest circumstance flashed upon his mind, with the distinctness of a scene of yesterday.

Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled

against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and went back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEREIN NICHOLAS AT LENGTH ENCOUNTERS HIS UNCLE, TO WHOM HE EXPRESSES HIS SENTIMENTS WITH MUCH CANDOUR. HIS RESOLUTION.

LITTLE Miss La Creevy trotted briskly through divers streets at the West-end of the town, early on Monday morning—the day after the dinner—charged with the important commission of acquainting Madame Mantalini that Miss Nickleby was too unwell to attend that day, but hoped to be enabled to resume her duties on the morrow. And as Miss La Creevy walked along, revolving in her mind various genteel forms and elegant turns of expression, with a view to the selection of the very best in which to couch her communication, she cogitated a good deal upon the probable causes of her young friend's indisposition.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Miss La Creevy. "Her eyes were decidedly red last night. She said she had a headache; headaches don't occasion red eyes. She must have been crying."

Arriving at this conclusion, which, indeed, she had established to her perfect satisfaction on the previous evening, Miss La Creevy went on to consider—as she had done nearly all night—what new cause of unhappiness her young friend could possibly have had.

"I can't think of anything," said the little portrait painter. "Nothing at all, unless it was the behaviour of that old bear. Cross to her, I suppose? Unpleasant brute!"

Relieved by this expression of opinion, albeit it was vented upon empty air, Miss La Creevy trotted on to Madame Mantalini's; and, being informed that the governing power was not yet out of bed, requested an interview with the second in command; whereupon Miss Knag appeared.

"So far as *I* am concerned," said Miss Knag when the message had been delivered, with many ornaments of speech; "I could spare Miss Nickleby for evermore."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am!" rejoined Miss La Creevy, highly offended. "But, you see, you are not mistress of the business, and therefore it's of no great consequence."

"Very good, ma'am," said Miss Knag. "Have you any further commands for me?"

"No, I have not, ma'am," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"Then good morning, ma'am," said Miss Knag.

"Good morning to you, ma'am; and many obligations for your extreme politeness and good-breeding," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

Thus terminating the interview, during which both ladies had trembled very much, and been marvellously polite—certain indications that they were within an inch of a very desperate quarrel—Miss La Creevy bounced out of the room, and into the street.

"I wonder who that is," said the queer little soul. "A nice person to know, I should think! I wish I had the painting of her: *I'd* do her justice!" So, feeling quite satisfied that she had said a very cutting thing at Miss Knag's expense, Miss La Creevy had a hearty laugh, and went home to breakfast in great good-humour.

Here was one of the advantages of having lived alone so long! The little bustling, active, cheerful creature existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confidante of herself, was as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her, by herself; pleased herself, and did no harm. If she indulged in scandal, nobody's reputation suffered; and, if she enjoyed a little bit of revenge, no living soul was one atom the worse. One of the many to whom, from straitened circumstances, a consequent inability to form the associations they would wish, and a disinclination to mix with the society they could obtain, London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria, the humble artist had pursued her lonely, but contented, way for many years; and, until the peculiar misfortunes of the Nickleby family attracted her attention, had made no friends, though brimful of the friendliest feelings to all mankind. There are many warm hearts in the same solitary guise as poor little Miss La Creevy's.

However, that's neither here nor there, just now. She went home to breakfast, and had scarcely caught the full flavour of her first sip of tea, when the servant announced a gentleman, whereat Miss La Creevy, at once imagining a new sitter transfixed by admiration at the street-door case, was in unspeakable consternation at the presence of the tea-things.

"Here, take 'em away; run with 'em into the bedroom; anywhere," said Miss La Creevy.

"Dear, dear! to think that I should be late on this particular morning, of all others, after being ready for three weeks by half-past eight o'clock, and not a soul coming near the place!"

"Don't let me put you out of the way," said a voice Miss La Creevy knew. "I told the servant not to mention my name, because I wished to surprise you."

"Mr. Nicholas!" cried Miss La Creevy, starting in great astonishment.

"You have not forgotten me, I see," replied Nicholas, extending his hand.

"Why, I think I should even have known you if I had met you in the street," said Miss La Creevy with a smile. "Hannah, another cup and saucer. Now, I'll tell you what, young man; I'll trouble you not to repeat the impertinence you were guilty of on the morning you went away."

"You would not be very angry, would you?" asked Nicholas.

"Wouldn't I?" said Miss La Creevy. "You had better try; that's all!"

Nicholas, with becoming gallantry, immediately took Miss La Creevy at her word, who uttered a faint scream, and slapped his face; but it was not a very hard slap, and that's the truth.

"I never saw such a rude creature!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy.

"You told me to try," said Nicholas.

"Well; but I was speaking ironically," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"Oh! that's another thing," said Nicholas; "you should have told me that, too."

"I dare say you didn't know, indeed!" retorted Miss La Creevy. "But, now I look at you again, you seem thinner than when I saw you last, and your face is haggard and pale. And how come you to have left Yorkshire?"

She stopped here; for there was so much heart in her altered tone and manner, that Nicholas was quite moved.

"I need look somewhat changed," he said after a short silence; "for I have undergone some suffering, both of mind and body, since I left London. I have been very poor, too, and have even suffered from want."

"Good Heaven, Mr. Nicholas!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy, "what are you telling me?"

"Nothing which need distress you quite so much," answered Nicholas with a more sprightly air; "neither did I come here to bewail my lot, but on matter more to the purpose. I wish to meet my uncle face to face. I should tell you that first."

"Then all I have to say about that is," interposed Miss La Creevy, "that I don't envy you your taste; and that sitting in the same room with his very boots would put me out of humour for a fortnight."

"In the main," said Nicholas, "there may be no great difference of opinion between you and me, so far; but you will understand that I desire to confront him, to justify myself, and to cast his duplicity and malice in his throat."

"That's quite another matter," rejoined Miss La Creevy. "Heaven forgive me! but I shouldn't cry my eyes quite out of my head, if they choked him. Well?"

"To this end, I called upon him this morning," said Nicholas. "He only returned to town on Saturday, and I knew nothing of his arrival until late last night."

"And did you see him?" asked Miss La Creevy.

"No," replied Nicholas. "He had gone out."

"Hah!" said Miss La Creevy; "on some kind, charitable business, I dare say."

"I have reason to believe," pursued Nicholas, "from what has been told me by a friend of mine who is acquainted with his movements, that he intends seeing my mother and sister to-day, and giving them his version of the occurrences that have befallen me. I will meet him there."

"That's right," said Miss La Creevy, rubbing her hands. "And yet I don't know," she added, "there is much to be thought of—others to be considered."

"I have considered others," rejoined Nicholas; "but, as honesty and honour are both at issue, nothing shall deter me."

"You should know best," said Miss La Creevy.

"In this case I hope so," answered Nicholas. "And all I want you to do for me is, to prepare them for my coming. They think me a long way off, and, if I went wholly unexpected, I should frighten them. If you can spare time to tell them that you have seen me, and that I shall be with them in a quarter of an hour afterwards, you will do me a great service."

"I wish I could do you, or any of you, a greater," said Miss La Creevy; "but the power to serve is as seldom joined with the will as the will is with the power, *I* think."

Talking on very fast and very much, Miss La Creevy finished her breakfast with great expedition, put away the tea-caddy and hid the key under the fender, resumed her bonnet, and, taking Nicholas's arm, sallied forth at once to the City. Nicholas left her near the door of

his mother's house, and promised to return within a quarter of an hour.

It so chanced that Ralph Nickleby, at length seeing fit, for his own purposes, to communicate the atrocities of which Nicholas had been guilty, had (instead of first proceeding to another quarter of the town on business, as Newman Noggs supposed he would) gone straight to his sister-in-law. Hence, when Miss La Creevy, admitted by a girl who was cleaning the house, made her way to the sitting-room, she found Mrs. Nickleby and Kate in tears, and Ralph just concluding his statement of his nephew's misdemeanours. Kate beckoned her not to retire, and Miss La Creevy took a seat in silence.

"You are here already, are you, my gentleman?" thought the little woman. "Then he shall announce himself, and see what effect that has on you."

"This is pretty," said Ralph, folding up Miss Squeers's note: "very pretty. I recommend him—against all my previous conviction, for I knew he would never do any good—to a man with whom, behaving himself properly, he might have remained, in comfort, for years. What is the result? Conduct for which he might hold up his hand at the Old Bailey."

"I never will believe it," said Kate indignantly; "never! It is some base conspiracy, which carries its own falsehood with it."

"My dear," said Ralph, "you wrong the worthy man. These are not inventions. The man is assaulted, your brother is not to be found; this boy, of whom they speak, goes with him—remember, remember."

"It is impossible," said Kate. "Nicholas!—and a thief, too! Mamma, how can you sit and hear such statements?"

Poor Mrs. Nickleby, who had, at no time, been remarkable for the possession of a very clear understanding, and who had been reduced by the late changes in her affairs to a most complicated state of perplexity, made no other reply to this earnest remonstrance than exclaiming, from behind a mass of pocket-handkerchief, that she never could have believed it—thereby most ingeniously leaving her hearers to suppose that she did believe it.

"It would be my duty, if he came in my way, to deliver him up to justice," said Ralph; "my bounden duty; I should have no other course, as a man of the world and a man of business, to pursue. And yet," said Ralph, speaking in a very marked manner, and looking furtively, but fixedly, at Kate, "and yet I would not. I would spare the feelings of his—of his sister. And his mother, of course," added Ralph, as though by an after-thought, and with far less emphasis.

Kate very well understood that this was held out as an additional inducement to her to preserve the strictest silence regarding the events of the preceding night. She looked involuntarily towards Ralph as he ceased to speak, but he had turned his eyes another way, and seemed for the moment quite unconscious of her presence.

"Everything," said Ralph after a long silence, broken only by Mrs. Nickleby's sobs, "everything combines to prove the truth of this letter, if, indeed, there were any possibility of disputing it. Do innocent men steal away from the sight of honest folks, and skulk in hiding-places, like outlaws? Do innocent men inveigle nameless vagabonds, and prowl with them about the country as idle robbers do? Assault, riot, theft, what do you call these?"

"A lie!" cried a voice as the door was dashed open, and Nicholas came into the room.

In the first moment of surprise, and possibly of alarm, Ralph rose from his seat, and fell back a few paces, quite taken off his guard by this unexpected apparition. In another moment, he stood, fixed and immovable with folded arms, regarding his nephew with a scowl; while Kate and Miss La Creevy threw themselves between the two, to prevent the personal violence which the fierce excitement of Nicholas appeared to threaten.

"Dear Nicholas!" cried his sister, clinging to him. "Be calm, consider——"

"Consider, Kate!" cried Nicholas, clasping her hand so tight in the tumult of his anger, that she could scarcely bear the pain. "When I consider all, and think of what has passed, I need be made of iron to stand before him."

"Or bronze," said Ralph quietly; "there is not hardihood enough in flesh and blood to face it out."

"Oh dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, "that things should have come to such a pass as this!"

"Who speaks in a tone as if I had done wrong, and brought disgrace on them?" said Nicholas, looking round.

"Your mother, sir," replied Ralph, motioning towards her.

"Whose ears have been poisoned by you," said Nicholas; "by you—who, under pretence of deserving the thanks she poured upon you, heaped every insult, wrong, and indignity upon my head. You, who sent me to a den where sordid cruelty, worthy of yourself, runs wanton, and youthful misery stalks precocious; where

the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age, and its every promise blights, and withers as it grows. I call Heaven to witness," said Nicholas, looking eagerly round, "that I have seen all this, and that he knows it."

"Refute these calumnies," said Kate, "and be more patient, so that you may give them no advantage. Tell us what you really did, and show that they are untrue."

"Of what do they—or of what does he—accuse me?" said Nicholas.

"First, of attacking your master, and being within an ace of qualifying yourself to be tried for murder," interposed Ralph. "I speak plainly, young man, bluster as you will."

"I interfered," said Nicholas, "to save a miserable creature from the vilest cruelty. In so doing, I inflicted such punishment upon a wretch as he will not readily forget, though far less than he deserved from me. If the same scene were renewed before me now, I would take the same part; but I would strike harder and heavier, and brand him with such marks as he should carry to his grave, go to it when he would."

"You hear?" said Ralph, turning to Mrs. Nickleby. "Penitence, this!"

"Oh dear me!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't know what to think, I really don't!"

"Do not speak just now, mamma, I entreat you," said Kate. "Dear Nicholas, I only tell you, that you may know what wickedness can prompt, but they accuse you of—a ring is missing, and they dare to say that——"

"The woman," said Nicholas haughtily, "the wife of the fellow from whom these charges come, dropped—as I suppose—a worthless ring among some clothes of mine, early in the morning on which I left the house. At least, I know that she was in the bedroom where they lay, struggling with an unhappy child, and that I found it when I opened my bundle on the road. I returned it, at once, by coach, and they have it now."

"I knew, I knew!" said Kate, looking towards her uncle. "About this boy, love, in whose company they say you left?"

"The boy, a silly, helpless creature, from brutality and hard usage, is with me now," rejoined Nicholas.

"You hear?" said Ralph, appealing to the mother again, "everything proved, even upon his own confession. Do you choose to restore that boy, sir?"

"No, I do not," replied Nicholas.

"You do not?" sneered Ralph.

"No," repeated Nicholas, "not to the man with whom I found him. I would that I knew on whom he has the claim of birth: I might wring something from his sense of shame, if he were dead to every tie of nature."

"Indeed!" said Ralph. "Now, sir, will you hear a word or two from me?"

"You can speak when and what you please," replied Nicholas, embracing his sister. "I take little heed of what you say or threaten."

"Mighty well, sir," retorted Ralph; "but perhaps it may concern others, who may think it worth their while to listen, and consider what I tell them. I will address your mother, sir, who knows the world."

"Ah! and I only too dearly wish I didn't," sobbed Mrs. Nickleby.

There really was no necessity for the good lady to be much distressed upon this particular head; the extent of her worldly knowledge being, to say the least, very questionable; and so Ralph seemed to think, for he smiled as she spoke. He then glanced steadily at her and Nicholas by turns, as he delivered himself in these words:

"Of what I have done, or what I meant to do, for you, ma'am, and my niece, I say not one syllable. I held out no promise, and leave you to judge for yourself. I hold out no threat now, but I say that this boy, headstrong, wilful, and disorderly as he is, should not have one penny of my money, or one crust of my bread, or one grasp of my hand, to save him from the loftiest gallows in all Europe. I will not meet him, come where he comes, or hear his name. I will not help him, or those who help him. With a full knowledge of what he brought upon you by so doing, he has come back in his selfish sloth, to be an aggravation of your wants, and a burden upon his sister's scanty wages. I regret to leave you, and more to leave her, now, but I will not encourage this compound of meanness and cruelty, and, as I will not ask you to renounce him, I see you no more."

If Ralph had not known and felt his power in wounding those he hated, his glances at Nicholas would have shown it him, in all its force, as he proceeded in the above address. Innocent as the young man was of all wrong, every artful insinuation stung, every well-considered sarcasm cut him to the quick; and, when Ralph noted his pale face and quivering lip, he hugged himself to mark how well he had chosen the taunts best calculated to strike deep into a young and ardent spirit.

"I can't help it," cried Mrs. Nickleby. "I know you have been very good to us, and meant

to do a good deal for my dear daughter. I am quite sure of that; I know you did, and it was very kind of you, having her at your house and all—and of course it would have been a great thing for her, and for me too. But I can't, you know, brother-in-law, I can't renounce my own son, even if he has done all you say he has—it's not possible; I couldn't do it; so we must go to rack and ruin, Kate, my dear. I can bear it, I dare say." Pouring forth these and a perfectly wonderful train of other disjointed expressions of regret, which no mortal power but Mrs. Nickleby's could ever have strung together, that lady wrung her hands, and her tears fell faster.

"Why do you say '*if* Nicholas has done what they say he has,' mamma?" asked Kate with honest anger. "You know he has not."

"I don't know what to think, one way or other, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby; "Nicholas is so violent, and your uncle has so much composure, that I can only hear what he says, and not what Nicholas does. Never mind, don't let us talk any more about it. We can go to the Workhouse, or the Refuge for the Destitute, or the Magdalen Hospital, I dare say; and the sooner we go the better." With this extraordinary jumble of charitable institutions, Mrs. Nickleby again gave way to her tears.

"Stay," said Nicholas as Ralph turned to go. "You need not leave this place, sir, for it will be relieved of my presence in one minute, and it will be long, very long, before I darken these doors again."

"Nicholas," cried Kate, throwing herself on her brother's shoulder, "do not say so! My dear brother, you will break my heart. Mamma, speak to him. Do not mind her, Nicholas; she does not mean it, you should know her better. Uncle, somebody, for Heaven's sake, speak to him!"

"I never meant, Kate," said Nicholas tenderly, "I never meant to stay among you; think better of me than to suppose it possible. I may turn my back on this town a few hours sooner than I intended, but what of that? We shall not forget each other apart, and better days will come, when we shall part no more. Be a woman, Kate," he whispered proudly, "and do not make me one while *he* looks on."

"No, no, I will not," said Kate eagerly, "but you will not leave us? Oh! think of all the happy days we have had together, before these terrible misfortunes came upon us; of all the comfort and happiness of home, and the trials we have to bear now; of our having no protector under all the slights and wrongs that poverty so much favours, and you cannot leave us to bear them alone, without one hand to help us."

"You will be helped when I am away," replied Nicholas hurriedly. "I am no help to you, no protector; I should bring you nothing but sorrow, and want, and suffering. My own mother sees it, and her fondness and fears for you point to the course that I should take. And so all good angels bless you, Kate, till I can carry you to some home of mine, where we may revive the happiness denied to us now, and talk of these trials as of things gone by. Do not keep me here, but let me go at once. There! Dear girl—dear girl!"

The grasp which had detained him relaxed, and Kate swooned in his arms. Nicholas stooped over her for a few seconds, and, placing her gently in a chair, confided her to their honest friend.

"I need not entreat your sympathy," he said, wringing her hand, "for I know your nature. You will never forget them."

He stepped up to Ralph, who remained in the same attitude which he had preserved throughout the interview, and moved not a finger.

"Whatever step you take, sir," he said in a voice inaudible beyond themselves, "I shall keep a strict account of. I leave them to you, at your desire. There will be a day of reckoning sooner or later, and it will be a heavy one for you if they are wronged."

Ralph did not allow a muscle of his face to indicate that he heard one word of this parting address. He hardly knew that it was concluded, and Mrs. Nickleby had scarcely made up her mind to detain her son by force if necessary, when Nicholas was gone.

As he hurried through the streets to his obscure lodging, seeking to keep pace, as it were, with the rapidity of the thoughts which crowded upon him, many doubts and hesitations arose in his mind, and almost tempted him to return. But what would they gain by this? Supposing he were to put Ralph Nickleby at defiance, and were even fortunate enough to obtain some small employment, his being with them could only render their present condition worse, and might greatly impair their future prospects; for his mother had spoken of some new kindnesses towards Kate, which she had not denied. "No," thought Nicholas, "I have acted for the best."

But, before he had gone five hundred yards, some other and different feeling would come upon him, and then he would lag again, and, pulling his hat over his eyes, give way to the

melancholy reflections which pressed thickly upon him. To have committed no fault, and yet to be so entirely alone in the world; to be separated from the only persons he loved, and to be proscribed like a criminal, when six months ago he had been surrounded by every comfort, and looked up to, as the chief hope of his family—this was hard to bear. He had not deserved it, either. Well, there was comfort in that; and poor Nicholas would brighten up again, to be again depressed, as his quickly-shifting thoughts presented every variety of light and shade before him.

Undergoing these alternations of hope and misgiving, which no one, placed in a situation of ordinary trial, can fail to have experienced, Nicholas at length reached his poor room, where, no longer borne up by the excitement which had hitherto sustained him, but depressed by the revulsion of feeling it left behind, he threw himself on the bed, and, turning his face to the wall, gave free vent to the emotions he had so long stifled.

He had not heard anybody enter, and was unconscious of the presence of Smike, until, happening to raise his head, he saw him standing at the upper end of the room, looking wistfully towards him. He withdrew his eyes when he saw that he was observed, and affected to be busied with some scanty preparations for dinner.

"Well, Smike," said Nicholas as cheerfully as he could speak, "let me hear what new acquaintances you have made this morning, or what new wonder you have found out, in the compass of this street and the next one."

"No," said Smike, shaking his head mournfully; "I must talk of something else to-day."

"Of what you like," replied Nicholas good-humouredly.

"Of this," said Smike. "I know you are unhappy, and have got into great trouble by bringing me away. I ought to have known that, and stopped behind—I would, indeed, if I had thought it then. You—you—are not rich: you have not enough for yourself, and I should not be here. You grow," said the lad, laying his hand timidly on that of Nicholas, "you grow thinner every day; your cheek is paler and your eye more sunk. Indeed, I cannot bear to see you so, and think how I am burdening you. I tried to go away to-day, but the thought of your kind face drew me back. I could not leave you without a word." The poor fellow could say no more, for his eyes filled with tears, and his voice was gone.

"The word which separates us," said Nicholas, grasping him heartily by the shoulder, "shall never be said by me, for you are my only comfort and stay. I would not lose you now, Smike, for all the world could give. The thought of you has upheld me through all I have endured to-day, and shall through fifty times such trouble. Give me your hand. My heart is linked to yours. We will journey from this place together before the week is out. What if I am steeped in poverty? You lighten it, and we will be poor together."

CHAPTER XXI.

MADAME MANTALINI FINDS HERSELF IN A SITUATION OF SOME DIFFICULTY, AND MISS NICKLEBY FINDS HERSELF IN NO SITUATION AT ALL.

THE agitation she had undergone rendered Kate Nickleby unable to resume her duties at the dressmaker's for three days, at the expiration of which interval she betook herself at the accustomed hour, and with languid steps, to the temple of fashion where Madame Mantalini reigned paramount and supreme.

The ill-will of Miss Knag had lost nothing of its virulence in the interval. The young ladies still scrupulously shrunk from all companionship with their denounced associate; and, when that exemplary female arrived a few minutes afterwards, she was at no pains to conceal the displeasure with which she regarded Kate's return.

"Upon my word!" said Miss Knag as the satellites flocked round, to relieve her of her bonnet and shawl; "I should have thought some people would have had spirit enough to stop away altogether, when they know what an encumbrance their presence is to right-minded persons. But it's a queer world. Oh! it's a queer world!"

Miss Knag, having passed this comment on the world, in the tone in which most people do pass comments on the world when they are out of temper, that is to say, as if they by no means belonged to it, concluded by heaving a sigh, wherewith she seemed meekly to compassionate the wickedness of mankind.

The attendants were not slow to echo the sigh, and Miss Knag was apparently on the eve of favouring them with some further moral reflections, when the voice of Madame Mantalini, conveyed through the speaking-tube, ordered Miss Nickleby up-stairs to assist in the arrangement of the show-room; a distinction which

caused Miss Knag to toss her head so much, and bite her lips so hard, that her powers of conversation were, for the time, annihilated.

"Well, Miss Nickleby, child," said Madame Mantalini when Kate presented herself, "are you quite well again?"

"A great deal better, thank you," replied Kate.

"I wish I could say the same," remarked Madame Mantalini, seating herself with an air of weariness.

"Are you ill?" asked Kate. "I am very sorry for that."

"Not exactly ill, but worried, child—worried," rejoined madame.

"I am still more sorry to hear that," said Kate gently. "Bodily illness is more easy to bear than mental."

"Ah! and it's much easier to talk than to bear either," said madame, rubbing her nose with much irritability of manner. "There, get to your work, child, and put the things in order, do!"

While Kate was wondering within herself what these symptoms of unusual vexation portended, Mr. Mantalini put the tips of his whiskers, and, by degrees, his head, through the half-opened door, and cried in a soft voice—

"Is my life and soul there?"

"No," replied his wife.

"How can it say so, when it is blooming in the front room like a little rose in a demnition flower-pot?" urged Mantalini. "May its poppet come in and talk?"

"Certainly not," replied madame: "you know I never allow you here. Go along!"

The poppet, however, encouraged, perhaps, by the relenting tone of this reply, ventured to rebel, and, stealing into the room, made towards Madame Mantalini on tiptoe, blowing her a kiss as he came along.

"Why will it vex itself, and twist its little face into bewitching nut-crackers?" said Mantalini, putting his left arm round the waist of his life and soul, and drawing her towards him with his right.

"Oh! I can't bear you," replied his wife.

"Not—eh? not bear *me!*" exclaimed Mantalini. "Fibs, fibs. It couldn't be. There's not a woman alive that could tell me such a thing to my face—to my own face." Mr. Mantalini stroked his chin as he said this, and glanced complacently at an opposite mirror.

"Such destructive extravagance," reasoned his wife in a low tone.

"All in its joy at having gained such a lovely creature, such a little Venus, such a demd, enchanting, bewitching, engrossing, captivating little Venus," said Mantalini.

"See what a situation you have placed me in!" urged madame.

"No harm will come, no harm shall come, to its own darling," rejoined Mr. Mantalini. "It is all over; there will be nothing the matter; money shall be got in; and, if it don't come in fast enough, old Nickleby shall stump up again, or have his jugular separated if he dares to vex and hurt the little——"

"Hush!" interposed madame. "Don't you see?"

Mr. Mantalini, who, in his eagerness to make up matters with his wife, had overlooked, or feigned to overlook, Miss Nickleby hitherto, took the hint, and, laying his finger on his lip, sunk his voice still lower. There was, then, a great deal of whispering, during which Madame Mantalini appeared to make reference, more than once, to certain debts incurred by Mr. Mantalini previous to her coverture; and also to an unexpected outlay of money in payment of the aforesaid debts; and furthermore, to certain agreeable weaknesses on that gentleman's part, such as gaming, wasting, idling, and a tendency to horse-flesh; each of which matters of accusation Mr. Mantalini disposed of by one kiss or more, as its relative importance demanded. The upshot of it all was, that Madame Mantalini was in raptures with him, and that they went up-stairs to breakfast.

Kate busied herself in what she had to do, and was silently arranging the various articles of decoration in the best taste she could display, when she started to hear a strange man's voice in the room, and started again to observe, on looking round, that a white hat, and a red neckerchief, and a broad round face, and a large head, and part of a green coat were in the room too.

"Don't alarm yourself, miss," said the proprietor of these appearances. "I say; this here's the mantie-making consarn, an't it?"

"Yes," rejoined Kate, greatly astonished. "What did you want?"

The stranger answered not; but, first looking back, as though to beckon to some unseen person outside, came, very deliberately, into the room, and was closely followed by a little man in brown, very much the worse for wear, who brought with him a mingled fumigation of stale tobacco and fresh onions. The clothes of this gentleman were much bespeckled with flue; and his shoes, stockings, and nether garments, from his heels to the waist buttons of his coat inclusive, were profusely embroidered with splashes

of mud, caught a fortnight previously—before the setting-in of the fine weather.

Kate's very natural impression was, that these engaging individuals had called with the view of possessing themselves, unlawfully, of any portable articles that chanced to strike their fancy. She did not attempt to disguise her apprehensions, and made a move towards the door.

"Wait a minnit," said the man in the green coat, closing it softly, and standing with his back against it. "This is a unpleasant bisness. Vere's your govvernor?"

"My what—did you say?" asked Kate, trembling; for she thought "governor" might be slang for watch or money.

"Mister Muntlehiney," said the man. "Wot's come on him? Is he at home?"

"He is above-stairs, I believe," replied Kate, a little reassured by this inquiry. "Do you want him?"

"No," replied the visitor. "I don't ezactly want him, if it's made a favour on. You can jist give him that 'ere card, and tell him if he wants to speak to *me*, and save trouble, here I am; that's all."

With these words the stranger put a thick square card into Kate's hand, and, turning to his friend, remarked, with an easy air, "that the rooms was a good high pitch;" to which the friend assented, adding, by way of illustration, "that there was lots of room for a little boy to grow up a man in either on 'em, vithout much fear of his ever bringing his head into contract vith the ceiling."

After ringing the bell which would summon Madame Mantalini, Kate glanced at the card, and saw that it displayed the name of "Scaley," together with some other information to which she had not had time to refer, when her attention was attracted by Mr. Scaley himself, who, walking up to one of the cheval-glasses, gave it a hard poke in the centre with his stick, as coolly as if it had been made of cast-iron.

"Good plate this here, Tix," said Mr. Scaley to his friend.

"Ah!" rejoined Mr. Tix, placing the marks of his four fingers, and a duplicate impression of his thumb, on a piece of sky-blue silk; "and this here article warn't made for nothing, mind you."

From the silk, Mr. Tix transferred his admiration to some elegant articles of wearing apparel, while Mr. Scaley adjusted his neckcloth, at leisure, before the glass, and afterwards, aided by its reflection, proceeded to the minute consideration of a pimple on his chin; in which absorbing occupation he was yet engaged when Madame Mantalini, entering the room, uttered an exclamation of surprise which roused him.

"Oh! Is this the missis?" inquired Scaley.

"It is Madame Mantalini," said Kate.

"Then," said Mr. Scaley, producing a small document from his pocket, and unfolding it very slowly, "this is a writ of execution, and, if it's not convenient to settle, we'll go over the house at wunst, please, and take the inwentory."

Poor Madame Mantalini wrung her hands for grief, and rung the bell for her husband; which done, she fell into a chair and a fainting fit simultaneously. The professional gentlemen, however, were not at all discomposed by this event, for Mr. Scaley, leaning upon a stand on which a handsome dress was displayed (so that his shoulders appeared above it, in nearly the same manner as the shoulders of the lady for whom it was designed would have done if she had had it on), pushed his hat on one side, and scratched his head with perfect unconcern, while his friend Mr. Tix, taking that opportunity for a general survey of the apartment preparatory to entering on business, stood with his inventory book under his arm, and his hat in his hand, mentally occupied in putting a price upon every object within his range of vision.

Such was the posture of affairs when Mr. Mantalini hurried in; and as that distinguished specimen had had a pretty extensive intercourse with Mr. Scaley's fraternity in his bachelor days, and was, besides, very far from being taken by surprise on the present agitating occasion, he merely shrugged his shoulders, thrust his hands down to the bottom of his pockets, elevated his eyebrows, whistled a bar or two, swore an oath or two, and, sitting astride upon a chair, put the best face upon the matter with great composure and decency.

"What's the demd total?" was the first question he asked.

"Fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound, four-and-ninepence-ha'penny," replied Mr. Scaley, without moving a limb.

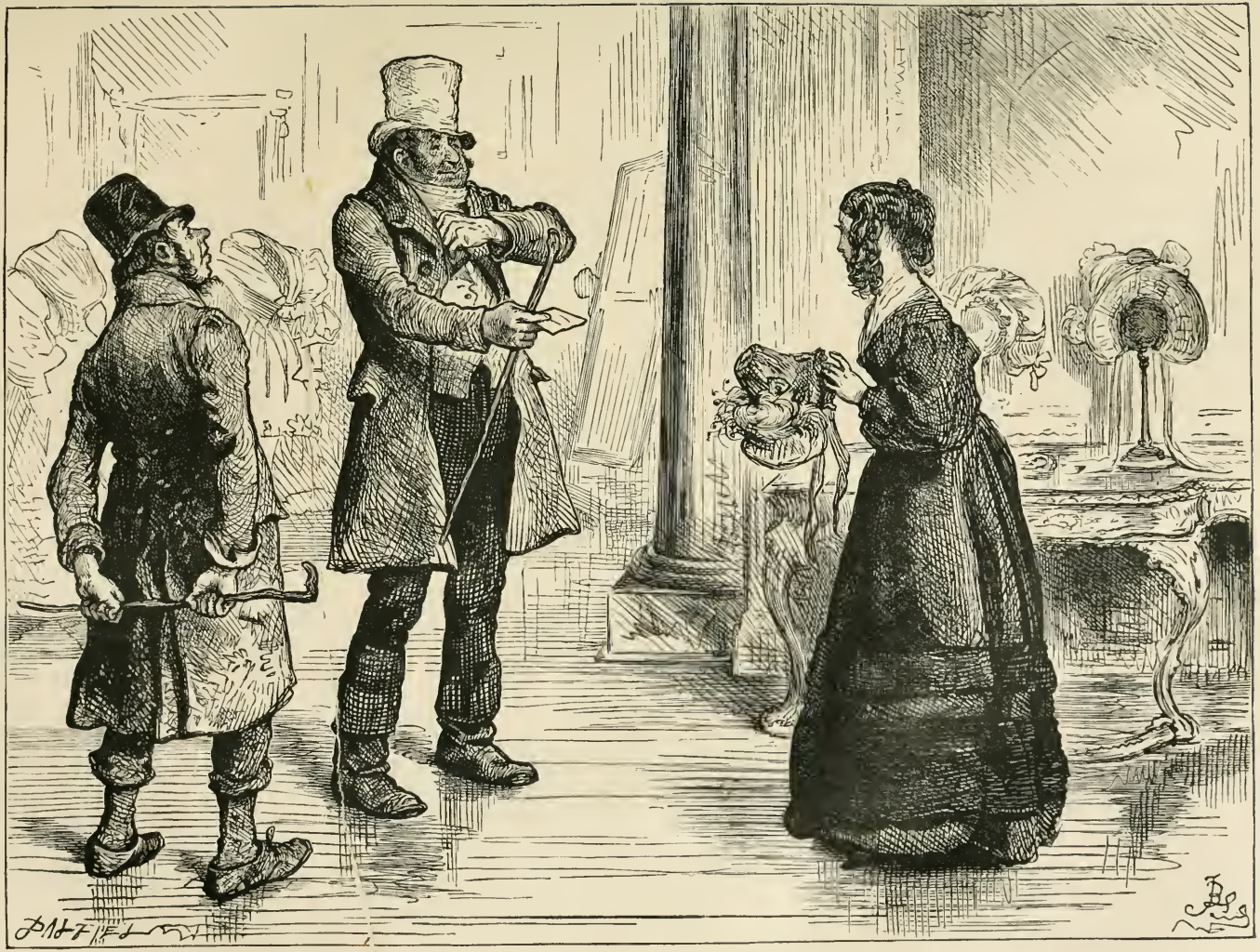
"The halfpenny be demd," said Mr. Mantalini impatiently.

"By all means, if you vish it," retorted Mr. Scaley; "and the ninepence."

"It don't matter to us if the fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound went along with it, that I know on," observed Mr. Tix.

"Not a button," said Scaley.

"Well," said the same gentleman after a pause, "wot's to be done—anything? Is it only a small crack, or a out-and-out smash? A



"YOU CAN JIST GIVE HIM THAT 'ERE CARD, AND TELL HIM IF HE WANTS TO SPEAK TO ME, AND SAVE TROUBLE, HERE I AM, THAT'S ALL."—P. 132

break-up of the constitootion is it?—Wery good. Then, Mr. Tom Tix, esk-vire, you must inform your angel wife and lovely family as you won't sleep at home for three nights to come, along of being in possession here. Wot's the good of the lady a fretting herself?" continued Mr. Scaley, as Madame Mantalini sobbed. "A good half of wot's here isn't paid for, I dessay, and wot a consolation oughtn't that to be to her feelings!"

With these remarks, combining great pleasantry with sound moral encouragement under difficulties, Mr. Scaley proceeded to take the inventory, in which delicate task he was materially assisted by the uncommon tact and experience of Mr. Tix, the broker.

"My cup of happiness's sweetener," said Mantalini, approaching his wife with a penitent air, "will you listen to me for two minutes?"

"Oh! don't speak to me," replied his wife,

"THE DRESSING-ROOM DOOR BEING HASTILY FLUNG OPEN, MR. MANTALINI WAS DISCLOSED TO VIEW, WITH HIS SHIRT COLLAR SYMMETRICALLY THROWN BACK: PUTTING A FINE EDGE TO A BREAKFAST KNIFE BY MEANS OF HIS RAZOR STROP."

sobbing. "You have ruined me, and that's enough."

Mr. Mantalini, who had doubtless well considered his part, no sooner heard these words pronounced in a tone of grief and severity than he recoiled several paces, assumed an expression of consuming mental agony, rushed headlong from the room, and was soon afterwards heard to slam the door of an up-stairs dressing-room with great violence.

"Miss Nickleby," cried Madame Mantalini when this sound met her ear, "make haste, for Heaven's sake, he will destroy himself! I spoke unkindly to him, and he cannot bear it from me. Alfred, my darling Alfred!"

With such exclamations, she hurried up-stairs, followed by Kate, who, although she did not quite participate in the fond wife's apprehensions, was a little flurried, nevertheless. The dressing-room door being hastily flung open,

Mr. Mantalini was disclosed to view, with his shirt collar symmetrically thrown back: putting a fine edge to a breakfast knife by means of his razor strop.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Mantalini, "interrupted!" and whisk went the breakfast knife into Mr. Mantalini's dressing-gown pocket, while Mr. Mantalini's eyes rolled wildly, and his hair, floating in wild disorder, mingled with his whiskers.

"Alfred," cried his wife, flinging her arms about him, "I didn't mean to say it, I didn't mean to say it!"

"Ruined!" cried Mr. Mantalini. "Have I brought ruin upon the best and purest creature that ever blessed a demnition vagabond? Demmit, let me go!" At this crisis of his ravings Mr. Mantalini made a pluck at the breakfast knife, and, being restrained by his wife's grasp, attempted to dash his head against the wall—taking very good care to be at least six feet from it.

"Compose yourself, my own angel," said madame. "It was nobody's fault; it was mine as much as yours; we shall do very well yet. Come, Alfred, come."

Mr. Mantalini did not think proper to come to all at once; but, after calling several times for poison, and requesting some lady or gentleman to blow his brains out, gentler feelings came upon him, and he wept pathetically. In this softened frame of mind he did not oppose the capture of the knife—which, to tell the truth, he was rather glad to be rid of, as an inconvenient and dangerous article for a skirt pocket—and finally, he suffered himself to be led away by his affectionate partner.

After a delay of two or three hours, the young ladies were informed that their services would be dispensed with until further notice, and, at the expiration of two days, the name of Mantalini appeared in the list of bankrupts: Miss Nickleby received an intimation per post, on the same morning, that the business would be, in future, carried on under the name of Miss Knag, and that her assistance would no longer be required—a piece of intelligence with which Mrs. Nickleby was no sooner made acquainted than that good lady declared she had expected it all along, and cited divers unknown occasions on which she had prophesied to that precise effect.

"And I say again," remarked Mrs. Nickleby (who, it is scarcely necessary to observe, had never said so before), "I say again, that a milliner's and dressmaker's is the very last description of business, Kate, that you should have thought of attaching yourself to. I don't make it a reproach to you, my love; but still I will say, that if you had consulted your own mother——"

"Well, well, mamma," said Kate mildly, "what would you recommend now?"

"Recommend!" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "Isn't it obvious, my dear, that of all occupations in this world for a young lady situated as you are, that of companion to some amiable lady is the very thing for which your education, and manners, and personal appearance, and everything else exactly qualify you? Did you never hear your poor dear papa speak of the young lady who was the daughter of the old lady who boarded in the same house that he boarded in once, when he was a bachelor—what was her name again? I know it began with a B, and ended with a g, but whether it was Waters or—no, it couldn't have been that, either; but, whatever her name was, don't you know that that young lady went as companion to a married lady who died soon afterwards, and that she married the husband, and had one of the finest little boys that the medical man had ever seen—all within eighteen months?

Kate knew, perfectly well, that this torrent of favourable recollection was occasioned by some opening, real or imaginary, which her mother had discovered in the companionship walk of life. She therefore waited, very patiently, until all reminiscences and anecdotes, bearing or not bearing upon the subject, had been exhausted, and at last ventured to inquire what discovery had been made. The truth then came out. Mrs. Nickleby had, that morning, had a yesterday's newspaper of the very first respectability from the public-house where the porter came from; and in this yesterday's newspaper was an advertisement, couched in the purest and most grammatical English, announcing that a married lady was in want of a genteel young person as companion, and that the married lady's name and address were to be known on application at a certain library at the West-end of the town, therein mentioned.

"And I say," exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby, laying the paper down in triumph, "that if your uncle don't object, it's well worth the trial."

Kate was too sick at heart, after the rough jostling she had already had with the world, and really cared too little at the moment what fate was reserved for her, to make any objection. Mr. Ralph Nickleby offered none, but, on the contrary, highly approved of the suggestion; neither did he express any great surprise at Madame Mantalini's sudden failure;

indeed, it would have been strange if he had, inasmuch as it had been procured and brought about chiefly by himself. So, the name and address were obtained without loss of time, and Miss Nickleby and her mamma went off in quest of Mrs. Wititterly, of Cadogan Place, Sloane Street, that same forenoon.

Cadogan Place is the one slight bond that joins two great extremes; it is the connecting link between the aristocratic pavement of Belgrave Square and the barbarism of Chelsea. It is in Sloane Street, but not of it. The people in Cadogan Place look down upon Sloane Street, and think Brompton low. They affect fashion, too, and wonder where the New Road is. Not that they claim to be on precisely the same footing as the high folks of Belgrave Square and Grosvenor Place, but that they stand, with reference to them, rather in the light of those illegitimate children of the great who are content to boast of their connections, although their connections disavow them. Wearing as much as they can of the airs and semblances of loftiest rank, the people of Cadogan Place have the realities of middle station. It is the conductor which communicates, to the inhabitants of regions beyond its limit, the shock of pride of birth and rank, which it has not within itself, but derives from a fountain-head beyond; or, like the ligament which unites the Siamese twins, it contains something of the life and essence of two distinct bodies, and yet belongs to neither.

Upon this doubtful ground lived Mrs. Wititterly, and at Mrs. Wititterly's door Kate Nickleby knocked with trembling hand. The door was opened by a big footman with his head floured, or chalked, or painted in some way (it didn't look genuine powder), and the big footman, receiving the card of introduction, gave it to a little page; so little, indeed, that his body would not hold, in ordinary array, the number of small buttons which are indispensable to a page's costume, and they were consequently obliged to be stuck on four abreast. This young gentleman took the card up-stairs on a salver, and, pending his return, Kate and her mother were shown into a dining-room of rather dirty and shabby aspect, and so comfortably arranged as to be adapted to almost any purpose rather than eating and drinking.

Now, in the ordinary course of things, and according to all authentic descriptions of high life, as set forth in books, Mrs. Wititterly ought to have been in her *boudoir:* but whether it was that Mr. Wititterly was at that moment shaving himself in the *boudoir*, or what not, certain it is that Mrs. Wititterly gave audience in the drawing-room, where was everything proper and necessary, including curtains and furniture coverings of a roseate hue, to shed a delicate bloom on Mrs. Wititterly's complexion, and a little dog to snap at strangers' legs for Mrs. Wititterly's amusement, and the afore-mentioned page, to hand chocolate for Mrs. Wititterly's refreshment.

The lady had an air of sweet insipidity, and a face of engaging paleness; there was a faded look about her, and about the furniture, and about the house. She was reclining on a sofa in such a very unstudied attitude, that she might have been taken for an actress all ready for the first scene in a ballet, and only waiting for the drop-curtain to go up.

"Place chairs."

The page placed them.

"Leave the room, Alphonse."

The page left it; but if ever an Alphonse carried plain Bill in his face and figure, that page was the boy.

"I have ventured to call, ma'am," said Kate after a few seconds of awkward silence, "from having seen your advertisement."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Wititterly, "one of my people put it in the paper.—Yes."

"I thought, perhaps," said Kate modestly, "that if you had not already made a final choice, you would forgive my troubling you with an application."

"Yes," drawled Mrs. Wititterly again.

"If you have already made a selection——"

"Oh dear no!" interrupted the lady, "I am not so easily suited. I really don't know what to say. You have never been a companion before, have you?"

Mrs. Nickleby, who had been eagerly watching her opportunity, came dexterously in before Kate could reply. "Not to any stranger, ma'am," said the good lady; "but she has been a companion to me for some years. I am her mother, ma'am."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Wititterly, "I apprehend you."

"I assure you, ma'am," said Mrs. Nickleby, "that I very little thought, at one time, that it would be necessary for my daughter to go out into the world at all, for her poor dear papa was an independent gentleman, and would have been at this moment if he had but listened in time to my constant entreaties and——"

"Dear mamma!" said Kate in a low voice.

"My dear Kate, if you will allow me to speak," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I shall take the liberty of explaining to this lady——"

"I think it is almost unnecessary, mamma."

And, notwithstanding all the frowns and winks with which Mrs. Nickleby intimated that she was going to say something which would clench the business at once, Kate maintained her point by an expressive look, and for once Mrs. Nickleby was stopped upon the very brink of an oration.

"What are your accomplishments?" asked Mrs. Wititterly with her eyes shut.

Kate blushed as she mentioned her principal acquirements, and Mrs. Nickleby checked them all off, one by one, on her fingers; having calculated the number before she came out. Luckily the two calculations agreed, so Mrs. Nickleby had no excuse for talking.

"You are a good temper?" asked Mrs. Wititterly, opening her eyes for an instant, and shutting them again.

"I hope so," rejoined Kate.

"And have a highly respectable reference for everything, have you?"

Kate replied that she had, and laid her uncle's card upon the table.

"Have the goodness to draw your chair a little nearer, and let me look at you," said Mrs. Wititterly; "I am so very near-sighted that I can't quite discern your features."

Kate complied, though not without some embarrassment, with this request, and Mrs. Wititterly took a languid survey of her countenance, which lasted some two or three minutes.

"I like your appearance," said that lady, ringing a little bell. "Alphonse, request your master to come here."

The page disappeared on this errand, and after a short interval, during which not a word was spoken on either side, opened the door for an important gentleman of about eight-and-thirty, of rather plebeian countenance, and with a very light head of hair, who leant over Mrs. Wititterly for a little time, and conversed with her in whispers.

"Oh!" he said, turning round, "yes. This is a most important matter. Mrs. Wititterly is of a very excitable nature; very delicate, very fragile; a hothouse plant, an exotic."

"Oh! Henry, my dear," interposed Mrs. Wititterly.

"You are, my love, you know you are; one breath——" said Mr. W., blowing an imaginary feather away. "Pho! you're gone!"

The lady sighed.

"Your soul is too large for your body," said Mr. Wititterly. "Your intellect wears you out; all the medical men say so; you know that there is not a physician who is not proud of being called in to you. What is their unanimous declaration? 'My dear doctor,' said I to Sir Tumley Snuffim in this very room, the very last time he came. 'My dear doctor, what is my wife's complaint? Tell me all. I can bear it. Is it nerves?' 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'be proud of that woman; make much of her; she is an ornament to the fashionable world, and to you. Her complaint is soul. It swells, expands, dilates—the blood fires, the pulse quickens, the excitement increases—Whew!'" Here Mr. Wititterly, who, in the ardour of his description, had flourished his right hand to within something less than an inch of Mrs. Nickleby's bonnet, drew it hastily back again, and blew his nose as fiercely as if it had been done by some violent machinery.

"You make me out worse than I am, Henry," said Mrs. Wititterly with a faint smile.

"I do not, Julia, I do not," said Mr. W. "The society in which you move—necessarily move, from your station, connection, and endowments—is one vortex and whirlpool of the most frightful excitement. Bless my heart and body, can I ever forget the night you danced with the baronet's nephew at the election ball at Exeter? It was tremendous!"

"I always suffer for these triumphs afterwards," said Mrs. Wititterly.

"And for that very reason," rejoined her husband, "you must have a companion, in whom there is great gentleness, great sweetness, excessive sympathy, and perfect repose."

Here, both Mr. and Mrs. Wititterly, who had talked rather at the Nicklebys than to each other, left off speaking, and looked at their two hearers, with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, "What do you think of all this?"

"Mrs. Wititterly," said her husband, addressing himself to Mrs. Nickleby, "is sought after and courted by glittering crowds and brilliant circles. She is excited by the opera, the drama, the fine arts, the—the—the——"

"The nobility, my love," interposed Mrs. Wititterly.

"The nobility, of course," said Mr. Wititterly. "And the military. She forms and expresses an immense variety of opinions on an immense variety of subjects. If some people in public life were acquainted with Mrs. Wititterly's real opinion of them, they would not hold their heads, perhaps, quite as high as they do."

"Hush, Henry!" said the lady; "this is scarcely fair."

"I mention no names, Julia," replied Mr.

Wititterly; "and nobody is injured. I merely mention the circumstance to show that you are no ordinary person; that there is a constant friction perpetually going on between your mind and your body; and that you must be soothed and tended. Now let me hear, dispassionately and calmly, what are this young lady's qualifications for the office."

In obedience to this request, the qualifications were all gone through again, with the addition of many interruptions and cross-questionings from Mr. Wititterly. It was finally arranged that inquiries should be made, and a decisive answer addressed to Miss Nickleby, under cover of her uncle, within two days. These conditions agreed upon, the page showed them down as far as the staircase window; and the big footman, relieving guard at that point, piloted them in perfect safety to the street-door.

"They are very distinguished people, evidently," said Mrs. Nickleby as she took her daughter's arm. "What a superior person Mrs. Wititterly is!"

"Do you think so, mamma?" was all Kate's reply.

"Why, who can help thinking so, Kate, my love?" rejoined her mother. "She is pale, though, and looks much exhausted. I hope she may not be wearing herself out, but I am very much afraid."

These considerations led the deep-sighted lady into a calculation of the probable duration of Mrs. Wititterly's life, and the chances of the disconsolate widower bestowing his hand on her daughter. Before reaching home, she had freed Mrs. Wititterly's soul from all bodily restraint; married Kate with great splendour at St. George's, Hanover Square; and only left undecided the minor question, whether a splendid French-polished mahogany bedstead should be erected for herself in the two-pair back of the house in Cadogan Place, or in the three-pair front: between which apartments she could not quite balance the advantages, and therefore adjusted the question, at last, by determining to leave it to the decision of her son-in-law.

The inquiries were made. The answer—not to Kate's very great joy—was favourable; and at the expiration of a week she betook herself, with all her movables and valuables, to Mrs. Wititterly's mansion, where, for the present, we will leave her.

CHAPTER XXII.

NICHOLAS, ACCOMPANIED BY SMIKE, SALLIES FORTH TO SEEK HIS FORTUNE. HE ENCOUNTERS MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES; AND WHO HE WAS IS HEREIN MADE MANIFEST.

THE whole capital which Nicholas found himself entitled to, either in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy, after paying his rent and settling with the broker from whom he had hired his poor furniture, did not exceed, by more than a few halfpence, the sum of twenty shillings. And yet he hailed the morning on which he had resolved to quit London with a light heart, and sprang from his bed with an elasticity of spirit which is happily the lot of young persons, or the world would never be stocked with old ones.

It was a cold, dry, foggy morning in early spring. A few meagre shadows flitted to and fro in the misty streets, and occasionally there loomed through the dull vapour the heavy outline of some hackney coach wending homewards, which, drawing slowly nearer, rolled jangling by, scattering the thin crust of frost from its whitened roof, and soon was lost again in the cloud. At intervals were heard the tread of slipshod feet, and the chilly cry of the poor sweep as he crept, shivering, to his early toil; the heavy footfall of the official watcher of the night, pacing slowly up and down, and cursing the tardy hours that still intervened between him and sleep; the rambling of ponderous carts and waggons; the roll of the lighter vehicles which carried buyers and sellers to the different markets; the sound of ineffectual knocking at the doors of heavy sleepers—all these noises fell upon the ear from time to time, but all seemed muffled by the fog, and to be rendered almost as indistinct to the ear as was every object to the sight. The sluggish darkness thickened as the day came on; and those who had the courage to rise and peep at the gloomy street from their curtained windows, crept back to bed again, and coiled themselves up to sleep.

Before even these indications of approaching morning were rife in busy London, Nicholas had made his way alone to the City, and stood beneath the windows of his mother's house. It was dull and bare to see, but it had light and life for him; for there was at least one heart within its old walls to which insult or dishonour would bring the same blood rushing that flowed in his own veins.

He crossed the road, and raised his eyes to the window of the room where he knew his sister slept. It was closed and dark. "Poor girl," thought Nicholas, "she little thinks who lingers here!"

He looked again, and felt, for the moment, almost vexed that Kate was not there to exchange one word at parting. "Good God!" he thought, suddenly correcting himself, "what a boy I am!"

"It is better as it is," said Nicholas after he had lounged on a few paces, and returned to the same spot. "When I left them before, and could have said good-bye a thousand times if I had chosen, I spared them the pain of leave-taking, and why not now?" As he spoke, some fancied motion of the curtain almost persuaded him, for the instant, that Kate was at the window, and, by one of those strange contradictions of feeling which are common to us all, he shrunk involuntarily into a doorway, that she might not see him. He smiled at his own weakness; said "God bless them!" and walked away with a lighter step.

Smike was anxiously expecting him when he reached his old lodgings, and so was Newman, who had expended a day's income in a can of rum-and-milk to prepare them for the journey. They had tied up the luggage, Smike shouldered it, and away they went, with Newman Noggs in company; for he had insisted on walking as far as he could with them overnight.

"Which way?" asked Newman wistfully.

"To Kingston first," replied Nicholas.

"And where afterwards?" asked Newman. "Why won't you tell me?"

"Because I scarcely know myself, good friend," rejoined Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder; "and if I did, I have neither plan nor prospect yet, and might shift my quarters a hundred times before you could possibly communicate with me."

"I am afraid you have some deep scheme in your head," said Newman doubtfully.

"So deep," replied his young friend, "that even I can't fathom it. Whatever I resolve upon, depend upon it I will write you soon."

"You won't forget?" said Newman.

"I am not very likely to," rejoined Nicholas. "I have not so many friends that I shall grow confused among the number, and forget my best one."

Occupied in such discourse, they walked on for a couple of hours, as they might have done for a couple of days if Nicholas had not sat himself down on a stone by the wayside, and resolutely declared his intention of not moving another step until Newman Noggs turned back. Having pleaded ineffectually first for another half-mile, and afterwards for another quarter, Newman was fain to comply, and to shape his course towards Golden Square, after interchanging many hearty and affectionate farewells, and many times turning back to wave his hat to the two wayfarers when they had become mere specks in the distance.

"Now listen to me, Smike," said Nicholas as they trudged with stout hearts onwards. "We are bound for Portsmouth."

Smike nodded his head and smiled, but expressed no other emotion; for whether they had been bound for Portsmouth or Port Royal would have been alike to him, so they had been bound together.

"I don't know much of these matters," resumed Nicholas; "but Portsmouth is a seaport town, and, if no other employment is to be obtained, I should think we might get on board some ship. I am young and active, and could be useful in many ways. So could you."

"I hope so," replied Smike. "When I was at that—you know where I mean?"

"Yes, I know," said Nicholas. "You needn't name the place."

"Well, when I was there," resumed Smike; his eyes sparkling at the prospect of displaying his abilities; "I could milk a cow, and groom a horse, with anybody."

"Ha!" said Nicholas gravely. "I am afraid they don't keep many animals of either kind on board ship, Smike, and even when they have horses, that they are not very particular about rubbing them down; still, you can learn to do something else, you know. Where there's a will there's a way."

"And I am very willing," said Smike, brightening up again.

"God knows you are," rejoined Nicholas; "and, if you fail, it shall go hard but I'll do enough for us both."

"Do we go all the way to-day?" asked Smike after a short silence.

"That would be too severe a trial, even for your willing legs," said Nicholas with a good-humoured smile. "No. Godalming is some thirty and odd miles from London—as I found from a map I borrowed—and I purpose to rest there. We must push on again to-morrow, for we are not rich enough to loiter. Let me relieve you of that bundle! Come!"

"No, no," rejoined Smike, falling back a few steps. "Don't ask me to give it up to you."

"Why not?" asked Nicholas.

"Let me do something for you, at least," said Smike. "You will never let me serve you as I ought. You will never know how I think, day and night, of ways to please you."

"You are a foolish fellow to say it, for I know it well, and see it, or I should be a blind and senseless beast," rejoined Nicholas. "Let me ask you a question while I think of it, and there is no one by," he added, looking him steadily in the face. "Have you a good memory?"

"I don't know," said Smike, shaking his head sorrowfully. "I think I had once; but it's all gone now—all gone."

"Why do you think you had once?" asked Nicholas, turning quickly upon him, as though the answer in some way helped out the purport of his question.

"Because I could remember when I was a child," said Smike, "but that is very, very long ago, or at least it seems so. I was always confused and giddy at that place you took me from; and could never remember, and sometimes couldn't even understand, what they said to me. I—let me see—let me see!"

"You are wandering now," said Nicholas, touching him on the arm.

"No," replied his companion with a vacant look. "I was only thinking how——" He shivered involuntarily as he spoke.

"Think no more of that place, for it is all over," retorted Nicholas, fixing his eyes full upon that of his companion, which was fast settling into an unmeaning stupefied gaze, once habitual to him, and common even then. "What of the first day you went to Yorkshire?"

"Eh?" cried the lad.

"That was before you began to lose your recollection, you know," said Nicholas quietly. "Was the weather hot or cold?"

"Wet," replied the boy. "Very wet. I have always said, when it has rained hard, that it was like the night I came: and they used to crowd round and laugh to see me cry when the rain fell heavily. It was like a child, they said, and that made me think of it more. I turned cold all over sometimes, for I could see myself as I was then, coming in at the very same door."

"As you were then," repeated Nicholas with assumed carelessness; "how was that?"

"Such a little creature," said Smike, "that they might have had pity and mercy upon me, only to remember it."

"You didn't find your way there alone?" remarked Nicholas.

"No," rejoined Smike; "oh no!"

"Who was with you?"

"A man—a dark, withered man. I have heard them say so at the school, and I remembered that before. I was glad to leave him, I was afraid of him; but they made me more afraid of them, and used me harder too."

"Look at me," said Nicholas, wishing to attract his full attention. "There; don't turn away. Do you remember no woman, no kind woman, who hung over you once, and kissed your lips, and called you her child?"

"No," said the poor creature, shaking his head, "no, never."

"Nor any house but that house in Yorkshire?"

"No," rejoined the youth with a melancholy look; "a room—I remember I slept in a room, a large lonesome room at the top of a house, where there was a trap-door in the ceiling. I have covered my head with the clothes often, not to see it, for it frightened me: a young child with no one near at night: and I used to wonder what was on the other side. There was a clock, too, an old clock, in one corner. I remember that. I have never forgotten that room; for, when I have terrible dreams, it comes back, just as it was. I see things and people in it that I had never seen then, but there is the room just as it used to be; *that* never changes."

"Will you let me take the bundle now?" asked Nicholas, abruptly changing the theme.

"No," said Smike, "no. Come, let us walk on."

He quickened his pace as he said this, apparently under the impression that they had been standing still during the whole of the previous dialogue. Nicholas marked him closely, and every word of this conversation remained upon his memory.

It was, by this time, within an hour of noon, and, although a dense vapour still enveloped the city they had left, as if the very breath of its busy people hung over their schemes of gain and profit, and found greater attraction there than in the quiet region above, in the open country it was clear and fair. Occasionally, in some low spots, they came upon patches of mist which the sun had not yet driven from their strongholds; but these were soon passed, and, as they laboured up the hills beyond, it was pleasant to look down, and see how the sluggish mass rolled heavily off before the cheering influence of day. A broad, fine, honest sun lighted up the green pastures and dimpled water with the semblance of summer, while it left the travellers all the invigorating freshness of that early time of year. The ground seemed elastic under their feet; the sheep-bells were music to their ears; and, exhilarated by exercise, and

stimulated by hope, they pushed onward with the strength of lions.

The day wore on, and all these bright colours subsided, and assumed a quieter tint, like young hopes softened down by time, or youthful features by degrees resolving into the calm and serenity of age. But they were scarcely less beautiful in their slow decline than they had been in their prime; for nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own; and from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy, that we can scarcely mark their progress.

To Godalming they came at last, and here they bargained for two humble beds, and slept soundly. In the morning they were astir: though not quite so early as the sun: and again afoot; if not with all the freshness of yesterday, still with enough of hope and spirit to bear them cheerily on.

It was a harder day's journey than yesterday's, for there were long and weary hills to climb; and in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill than up. However, they kept on with unabated perseverance, and the hill has not yet lifted its face to heaven that perseverance will not gain the summit of at last.

They walked upon the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl; and Smike listened with greedy interest as Nicholas read the inscription upon the stone which, reared upon that wild spot, tells of a murder committed there by night. The grass on which they stood had once been dyed with gore; and the blood of the murdered man had run down, drop by drop, into the hollow which gives the place its name. "The Devil's Bowl," thought Nicholas as he looked into the void, "never held fitter liquor than that!"

Onward they kept with steady purpose, and entered at length upon a wide and spacious tract of downs, with every variety of little hill and plain to change their verdant surface. Here there shot up, almost perpendicularly, into the sky, a height so steep as to be hardly accessible to any but the sheep and goats that fed upon its sides, and there stood a mound of green, sloping and tapering off so delicately, and merging so gently into the level ground, that you could scarce define its limits. Hills swelling above each other; and undulations shapely and uncouth, smooth and rugged, graceful and grotesque, thrown negligently side by side, bounded the view in each direction; while frequently, with unexpected noise, there uprose from the ground a flight of crows, who, cawing and wheeling round the nearest hills, as if uncertain of their course, suddenly poised themselves upon the wing, and skimmed down the long vista of some opening valley with the speed of light itself.

By degrees the prospect receded more and more on either hand, and, as they had been shut out from rich and extensive scenery, so they emerged once again upon the open country. The knowledge that they were drawing near their place of destination gave them fresh courage to proceed; but the way had been difficult, and they had loitered on the road, and Smike was tired. Thus, twilight had already closed in, when they turned off the path to the door of a roadside inn, yet twelve miles short of Portsmouth.

"Twelve miles," said Nicholas, leaning with both hands on his stick, and looking doubtfully at Smike.

"Twelve long miles," repeated the landlord.

"Is it a good road?" inquired Nicholas.

"Very bad," said the landlord. As of course, being a landlord, he would say.

"I want to get on," observed Nicholas, hesitating. "I scarcely know what to do."

"Don't let me influence you," rejoined the landlord. "*I* wouldn't go on if it was me."

"Wouldn't you?" asked Nicholas with the same uncertainty.

"Not if I knew when I was well off," said the landlord. And, having said it, he pulled up his apron, put his hands into his pockets, and, taking a step or two outside the door, looked down the dark road with an assumption of great indifference.

A glance at the toil-worn face of Smike determined Nicholas; so, without any further consideration, he made up his mind to stay where he was.

The landlord led them into the kitchen, and, as there was a good fire, he remarked that it was very cold. If there had happened to be a bad one, he would have observed that it was very warm.

"What can you give us for supper?" was Nicholas's natural question.

"Why—what would you like?" was the landlord's no less natural answer.

Nicholas suggested cold meat, but there was no cold meat—poached eggs, but there were no eggs—mutton chops, but there wasn't a mutton chop within three miles, though there had been more last week than they knew what to do with, and would be an extraordinary supply the day after to-morrow.

"Then," said Nicholas, "I must leave it entirely to you, as I would have done at first, if you had allowed me."

"Why, then, I'll tell you what," rejoined the

landlord. "There's a gentleman in the parlour that's ordered a hot beef-steak pudding and potatoes at nine. There's more of it than he can manage, and I have very little doubt that, if I ask leave, you can sup with him. I'll do that in a minute."

"No, no," said Nicholas, detaining him. "I would rather not. I—at least—pshaw! why cannot I speak out? Here; you see that I am travelling in a very humble manner, and have made my way hither on foot. It is more than probable, I think, that the gentleman may not relish my company; and, although I am the dusty figure you see, I am too proud to thrust myself into his."

"Lord love you!" said the landlord, "it's only Mr. Crummles; *he* isn't particular."

"Is he not?" asked Nicholas, on whose mind, to tell the truth, the prospect of the savoury pudding was making some impression.

"Not he," replied the landlord. "He'll like your way of talking, I know. But we'll soon see all about that. Just wait a minute."

The landlord hurried into the parlour, without staying for further permission, nor did Nicholas strive to prevent him: wisely considering that supper, under the circumstances, was too serious a matter to be trifled with. It was not long before the host returned in a condition of much excitement.

"All right," he said in a low voice. "I knew he would. You'll see something rather worth seeing in there. Ecod, how they are a-going of it!"

There was no time to inquire to what this exclamation, which was delivered in a very rapturous tone, referred; for he had already thrown open the door of the room; into which Nicholas, followed by Smike with the bundle on his shoulder (he carried it about with him as vigilantly as if it had been a sack of gold), straightway repaired.

Nicholas was prepared for something odd, but not for something quite so odd as the sight he encountered. At the upper end of the room were a couple of boys, one of them very tall and the other very short, both dressed as sailors —or at least as theatrical sailors, with belts, buckles, pigtails, and pistols complete—fighting what is called in play-bills a terrific combat, with two of those short broadswords with basket hilts which are commonly used at our minor theatres. The short boy had gained a great advantage over the tall boy, who was reduced to mortal strait, and both were overlooked by a large heavy man, perched against the corner of a table, who emphatically adjured them to strike a little more fire out of the swords, and they couldn't fail to bring the house down on the very first night.

"Mr. Vincent Crummles!" said the landlord with an air of great deference. "This is the young gentleman."

Mr. Vincent Crummles received Nicholas with an inclination of the head, something between the courtesy of a Roman emperor and the nod of a pot companion; and bade the landlord shut the door and begone.

"There's a picture!" said Mr. Crummles, motioning Nicholas not to advance and spoil it. "The little 'un has him; if the big 'un doesn't knock under in three seconds, he's a dead man. Do that again, boys."

The two combatants went to work afresh, and chopped away until the swords emitted a shower of sparks: to the great satisfaction of Mr. Crummles, who appeared to consider this a very great point indeed. The engagement commenced with about two hundred chops administered by the short sailor and the tall sailor alternately, without producing any particular result, until the short sailor was chopped down on one knee; but this was nothing to him, for he worked himself about on the one knee with the assistance of his left hand, and fought most desperately until the tall sailor chopped his sword out of his grasp. Now, the inference was, that the short sailor, reduced to this extremity, would give in at once, and cry quarter, but, instead of that, he all of a sudden drew a large pistol from his belt, and presented it at the face of the tall sailor, who was so overcome at this (not expecting it), that he let the short sailor pick up his sword and begin again. Then the chopping recommenced, and a variety of fancy chops were administered on both sides; such as chops dealt with the left hand, and under the leg, and over the right shoulder, and over the left; and when the short sailor made a vigorous cut at the tall sailor's legs, which would have shaved them clean off if it had taken effect, the tall sailor jumped over the short sailor's sword, wherefore, to balance the matter, and make it all fair, the tall sailor administered the same cut, and the short sailor jumped over *his* sword. After this, there was a good deal of dodging about, and hitching up of the inexpressibles in the absence of braces, and then the short sailor (who was the moral character evidently, for he always had the best of it) made a violent demonstration, and closed with the tall sailor, who, after a few unavailing struggles, went down, and expired in great torture as the short sailor put his foot upon his breast, and bored a hole in him through and through.

"That'll be a double *encore* if you take care,

boys," said Mr. Crummles. "You had better get your wind now, and change your clothes."

Having addressed these words to the combatants, he saluted Nicholas, who then observed that the face of Mr. Crummles was quite proportionate in size to his body; that he had a very full under lip, a hoarse voice, as though he were in the habit of shouting very much, and very short black hair, shaved off nearly to the crown of his head—to admit (as he afterwards learnt) of his more easily wearing character wigs of any shape or pattern.

"What did you think of that, sir?" inquired Mr. Crummles.

"Very good indeed—capital!" answered Nicholas.

"You won't see such boys as those very often, I think," said Mr. Crummles.

Nicholas assented—observing that if they were a little better match——

"Match!" cried Mr. Crummles.

"I mean if they were a little more of a size," said Nicholas, explaining himself.

"Size!" repeated Mr. Crummles; "why, it's the essence of the combat that there should be a foot or two between them! How are you to get up the sympathies of the audience in a legitimate manner, if there isn't a little man contending against a big one?—unless there's at least five to one, and we haven't hands enough for that business in our company."

"I see," replied Nicholas. "I beg your pardon. That didn't occur to me, I confess."

"It's the main point," said Mr. Crummles. "I open at Portsmouth the day after to-morrow. If you're going there, look into the theatre, and see how that'll tell."

Nicholas promised to do so if he could, and, drawing a chair near the fire, fell into conversation with the manager at once. He was very talkative and communicative, stimulated, perhaps, not only by his natural disposition, but by the spirits-and-water he sipped very plentifully, or the snuff he took in large quantities from a piece of whity-brown paper in his waistcoat pocket. He laid open his affairs without the smallest reserve, and descanted at some length upon the merits of his company, and the acquirements of his family; of both of which the two broadsword boys formed an honourable portion. There was to be a gathering, it seemed, of the different ladies and gentlemen at Portsmouth on the morrow, whither the father and sons were proceeding (not for the regular season, but in the course of a wandering speculation), after fulfilling an engagement at Guildford with the greatest applause.

"You are going that way?" asked the manager.

"Ye-yes," said Nicholas. "Yes, I am."

"Do you know the town at all?" inquired the manager, who seemed to consider himself entitled to the same degree of confidence as he had himself exhibited.

"No," replied Nicholas.

"Never there?"

"Never."

Mr. Vincent Crummles gave a short dry cough, as much as to say, "If you won't be communicative, you won't;" and took so many pinches of snuff from the piece of paper, one after another, that Nicholas quite wondered where it all went to.

While he was thus engaged, Mr. Crummles looked, from time to time, with great interest at Smike, with whom he had appeared considerably struck from the first. He had now fallen asleep, and was nodding in his chair.

"Excuse my saying so," said the manager, leaning over to Nicholas, and sinking his voice, "but what a capital countenance your friend has got!"

"Poor fellow!" said Nicholas with a half-smile, "I wish it were a little more plump, and less haggard."

"Plump!" exclaimed the manager, quite horrified; "you'd spoil it for ever."

"Do you think so?"

"Think so, sir! Why, as he is now," said the manager, striking his knee emphatically; "without a pad upon his body, and hardly a touch of paint upon his face, he'd make such an actor for the starved business as was never seen in this country. Only let him be tolerably well up in the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet, with the slightest possible dab of red on the tip of his nose, and he'd be certain of three rounds the moment he put his head out of the practicable door in the front grooves O. P."

"You view him with a professional eye," said Nicholas, laughing.

"And well I may," rejoined the manager. "I never saw a young fellow so regularly cut out for that line since I've been in the profession. And I played the heavy children when I was eighteen months old."

The appearance of the beef-steak pudding, which came in simultaneously with the junior Vincent Crummleses, turned the conversation to other matters, and, indeed, for a time, stopped it altogether. These two young gentlemen wielded their knives and forks with scarcely less address than their broadswords, and, as the whole party were quite as sharp set as either class of weapons, there was no

time for talking until the supper had been disposed of.

The Master Crummleses had no sooner swallowed the last procurable morsel of food than they evinced, by various half-suppressed yawns and stretchings of their limbs, an obvious inclination to retire for the night, which Smike had betrayed still more strongly: he having, in the course of the meal, fallen asleep several times while in the very act of eating. Nicholas therefore proposed that they should break up at once, but the manager would by no means hear of it; vowing that he had promised himself the pleasure of inviting his new acquaintance to share a bowl of punch, and that, if he declined, he should deem it very unhandsome behaviour.

"Let them go," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, "and we'll have it snugly and cosily together by the fire."

Nicholas was not much disposed to sleep: being, in truth, too anxious: so, after a little demur, he accepted the offer, and having exchanged a shake of the hand with the young Crummleses, and the manager having on his part bestowed a most affectionate benediction on Smike, he sat himself down opposite to that gentleman by the fireside to assist in emptying the bowl, which soon afterwards appeared, steaming in a manner which was quite exhilarating to behold, and sending forth a most grateful and inviting fragrance.

But, despite the punch and the manager, who told a variety of stories, and smoked tobacco from a pipe, and inhaled it in the shape of snuff, with a most astonishing power, Nicholas was absent and dispirited. His thoughts were in his old home, and, when they reverted to his present condition, the uncertainty of the morrow cast a gloom upon him, which his utmost efforts were unable to dispel. His attention wandered; although he heard the manager's voice, he was deaf to what he said; and when Mr. Vincent Crummles concluded the history of some long adventure with a loud laugh, and an inquiry what Nicholas would have done under the same circumstances, he was obliged to make the best apology in his power, and to confess his entire ignorance of all he had been talking about.

"Why, so I saw," observed Mr. Crummles. "You're uneasy in your mind. What's the matter?"

Nicholas could not refrain from smiling at the abruptness of the question; but, thinking it scarcely worth while to parry it, owned that he was under some apprehensions lest he might not succeed in the object which had brought him to that part of the country.

"And what's that?" asked the manager.

"Getting something to do which will keep me and my poor fellow-traveller in the common necessaries of life," said Nicholas. "That's the truth. You guessed it long ago, I dare say, so I may as well have the credit of telling it you with a good grace."

"What's to be got to do at Portsmouth more than anywhere else?" asked Mr. Vincent Crummles, melting the sealing-wax on the stem of his pipe in the candle, and rolling it out afresh with his little finger.

"There are many vessels leaving the port, I suppose," replied Nicholas. "I shall try for a berth in some ship or other. There is meat and drink there, at all events."

"Salt meat and new rum; pease-pudding and chaff-biscuits," said the manager, taking a whiff at his pipe to keep it alight, and returning to his work of embellishment.

"One may do worse than that," said Nicholas. "I can rough it, I believe, as well as most young men of my age and previous habits."

"You need be able to," said the manager, "if you go on board ship; but you won't."

"Why not?"

"Because there's not a skipper or mate that would think you worth your salt, when he could get a practised hand," replied the manager; "and they as plentiful there as the oysters in the streets."

"What do you mean?" asked Nicholas, alarmed by this prediction, and the confident tone in which it had been uttered. "Men are not born able seamen. They must be reared, I suppose?"

Mr. Vincent Crummles nodded his head. "They must; but not at your age, or from young gentlemen like you."

There was a pause. The countenance of Nicholas fell, and he gazed ruefully at the fire.

"Does no other profession occur to you, which a young man of your figure and address could take up easily, and see the world to advantage in?" asked the manager.

"No," said Nicholas, shaking his head.

"Why, then, I'll tell you one," said Mr. Crummles, throwing his pipe into the fire, and raising his voice. "The stage."

"The stage!" cried Nicholas in a voice almost as loud.

"The theatrical profession," said Mr. Vincent Crummles. "I am in the theatrical profession myself, my wife is in the theatrical profession, my children are in the theatrical profession. I had a dog that lived and died in it from a puppy; and my chaise-pony goes on in Timour

the Tartar. I'll bring you out, and your friend too. Say the word. I want a novelty."

"I don't know anything about it," rejoined Nicholas, whose breath had been almost taken away by this sudden proposal. "I never acted a part in my life, except at school."

"There's genteel comedy in your walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in your eye, and touch-and-go farce in your laugh," said Mr. Vincent Crummles. "You'll do as well as if you had thought of nothing else but the lamps from your birth downwards."

Nicholas thought of the small amount of small change that would remain in his pocket after paying the tavern bill: and he hesitated.

"You can be useful to us in a hundred ways," said Mr. Crummles. "Think what capital bills a man of your education could write for the shop-windows."

"Well, I think I could manage that department," said Nicholas.

"To be sure you could!" replied Mr. Crummles. "'For further particulars see small handbills'—we might have half a volume in every

"MR. CRUMMLES LOOKED, FROM TIME TO TIME, WITH GREAT INTEREST AT SMIKE, WITH WHOM HE HAD APPEARED CONSIDERABLY STRUCK FROM THE FIRST. HE HAD NOW FALLEN ASLEEP, AND WAS NODDING IN HIS CHAIR."

one of 'em. Pieces, too; why, you could write us a piece to bring out the whole strength of the company whenever we wanted one."

"I am not quite so confident about that," replied Nicholas. "But I dare say I could scribble something now and then that would suit you."

"We'll have a new show-piece out directly," said the manager. "Let me see—peculiar resources of this establishment—new and splendid scenery—you must manage to introduce a real pump and two washing-tubs."

"Into the piece?" said Nicholas.

"Yes," replied the manager. "I bought 'em cheap, at a sale the other day, and they'll come in admirably. That's the London plan. They look up some dresses and properties, and have a piece written to fit 'em. Most of the theatres keep an author on purpose."

"Indeed!" cried Nicholas.

"Oh yes!" said the manager; "a common thing. It'll look very well in the bills in separate lines—Real pump!—Splendid tubs!—Great attraction! You don't happen to be anything of an artist, do you?"

"That is not one of my accomplishments," rejoined Nicholas.

"Ah! Then it can't be helped," said the manager. "If you had been, we might have had a large woodcut of the last scene for the posters, showing the whole depth of the stage, with the pump and tubs in the middle: but, however, if you're not, it can't be helped."

"What should I get for all this?" inquired Nicholas after a few moments' reflection. "Could I live by it?"

"Live by it!" said the manager. "Like a prince! With your own salary, and your friend's, and your writings, you'd make—ah! you'd make a pound a week!"

"You don't say so!"

"I do indeed, and, if we had a run of good houses, nearly double the money."

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders; but sheer destitution was before him; and if he could summon fortitude to undergo the extremes of want and hardship, for what had he rescued his helpless charge if it were only to bear as hard a fate as that from which he had wrested him? It was easy to think of seventy miles as nothing, when he was in the same town with the man who had treated him so ill, and roused his bitterest thoughts; but now it seemed far enough. What if he went abroad, and his mother or Kate were to die the while?

Without more deliberation, he hastily declared that it was a bargain, and gave Mr. Vincent Crummles his hand upon it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TREATS OF THE COMPANY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES, AND OF HIS AFFAIRS, DOMESTIC AND THEATRICAL.

As Mr. Crummles had a strange four-legged animal in the inn stables, which he called a pony, and a vehicle of unknown design, on which he bestowed the appellation of a four-wheeled phaeton, Nicholas proceeded on his journey next morning with greater ease than he had expected: the manager and himself occupying the front seat; and the Master Crummleses and Smike being packed together behind, in company with a wicker basket defended from wet by a stout oil-skin, in which were the broadswords, pistols, pigtails, nautical costumes, and other professional necessaries of the aforesaid young gentlemen.

The pony took his time upon the road, and—possibly in consequence of his theatrical education—evinced, every now and then, a strong inclination to lie down. However, Mr. Vincent Crummles kept him up pretty well by jerking the rein and plying the whip; and when these means failed, and the animal came to a stand, the elder Master Crummles got out and kicked him. By dint of these encouragements, he was persuaded to move from time to time, and they jogged on (as Mr. Crummles truly observed) very comfortably for all parties.

"He's a good pony at bottom," said Mr. Crummles, turning to Nicholas.

He might have been at bottom, but he certainly was not at top, seeing that his coat was of the roughest and most ill-favoured kind. So, Nicholas merely observed that he shouldn't wonder if he was.

"Many and many is the circuit this pony has gone," said Mr. Crummles, flicking him skilfully on the eyelid for old acquaintance' sake. "He is quite one of us. His mother was on the stage."

"Was she?" rejoined Nicholas.

"She ate apple-pie at a circus for upwards of fourteen years," said the manager; "fired pistols, and went to bed in a nightcap; and, in short, took the low comedy entirely. His father was a dancer."

"Was he at all distinguished?"

"Not very," said the manager. "He was rather a low sort of pony. The fact is, he had been originally jobbed out by the day, and he never quite got over his old habits. He was clever in melodrama, too, but too broad—too broad. When the mother died, he took the port-wine business."

"The port-wine business!" cried Nicholas.

"Drinking port wine with the clown," said the manager; "but he was greedy, and one night bit off the bowl of the glass, and choked himself, so his vulgarity was the death of him at last."

The descendant of this ill-starred animal requiring increased attention from Mr. Crummles as he progressed in his day's work, that gentleman had very little time for conversation. Nicholas was thus left at leisure to entertain himself with his own thoughts, until they arrived at the drawbridge at Portsmouth, when Mr. Crummles pulled up.

"We'll get down here," said the manager, "and the boys will take him round to the stable, and call at my lodgings with the luggage. You had better let yours be taken there for the present."

Thanking Mr. Vincent Crummles for his obliging offer, Nicholas jumped out, and giving Smike his arm, accompanied the manager up High Street on their way to the theatre; feeling nervous and uncomfortable enough at the prospect of an immediate introduction to a scene so new to him.

They passed a great many bills, pasted against the walls and displayed in windows, wherein the names of Mr. Vincent Crummles, Mrs. Vincent Crummles, Master Crummles, Master P. Crummles, and Miss Crummles were printed in very large letters, and everything else in very small ones; and, turning at length into an entry, in which was a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of sawdust, groped their way through a dark passage, and, descending a step or two, threaded a little maze of canvas screens and paint pots, and emerged upon the stage of the Portsmouth Theatre.

"Here we are," said Mr. Crummles.

It was not very light, but Nicholas found himself close to the first entrance on the prompt side, among bare walls, dusty scenes, mildewed clouds, heavily-daubed draperies, and dirty floors. He looked about him; ceiling, pit, boxes, gallery, orchestra, fittings, and decorations of every kind,—all looked coarse, cold, gloomy, and wretched.

"Is this a theatre?" whispered Smike in amazement. "I thought it was a blaze of light and finery."

"Why, so it is," replied Nicholas, hardly less surprised; "but not by day, Smike—not by day."

The manager's voice recalled him from a more careful inspection of the building to the opposite side of the proscenium, where, at a small mahogany table with rickety legs and of an oblong shape, sat a stout, portly female, apparently between forty and fifty, in a tarnished silk cloak, with her bonnet dangling by the strings in her hand, and her hair (of which she had a great quantity) braided in a large festoon over each temple.

"Mr. Johnson," said the manager (for Nicholas had given the name which Newman Noggs had bestowed upon him in his conversation with Mrs. Kenwigs), "let me introduce Mrs. Vincent Crummles."

"I am glad to see you, sir," said Mrs. Vincent Crummles in a sepulchral voice. "I am very glad to see you, and still more happy to hail you as a promising member of our corps."

The lady shook Nicholas by the hand, as she addressed him in these terms; he saw it was a large one, but had not expected quite such an iron grip as that with which she honoured him.

"And this," said the lady, crossing to Smike, as tragic actresses cross when they obey a stage direction, "and this is the other? You, too, are welcome, sir."

"He'll do, I think, my dear?" said the manager, taking a pinch of snuff.

"He is admirable," replied the lady. "An acquisition, indeed."

As Mrs. Vincent Crummles recrossed back to the table, there bounded on to the stage, from some mysterious inlet, a little girl in a dirty white frock with tucks up to the knees, short trousers, sandalled shoes, white spencer, pink gauze bonnet, green veil, and curl-papers; who turned a pirouette, cut twice in the air, turned another pirouette, then, looking off at the opposite wing, shrieked, bounded forward to within six inches of the foot-lights, and fell into a beautiful attitude of terror, as a shabby gentleman in an old pair of buff slippers came in at one powerful slide, and, chattering his teeth, fiercely brandished a walking-stick.

"They are going through the Indian Savage and the Maiden," said Mrs. Crummles.

"Oh!" said the manager, "the little ballet interlude. Very good, go on. A little this way, if you please, Mr. Johnson. That'll do. Now!"

The manager clapped his hands as a signal to proceed, and the savage, becoming ferocious, made a slide towards the maiden; but the maiden avoided him in six twirls, and came down, at the end of the last one, upon the very points of her toes. This seemed to make some impression upon the savage; for, after a little more ferocity and chasing of the maiden into corners, he began to relent, and stroked his face several times with his right thumb and four fingers, thereby intimating that he was struck with admiration of the maiden's beauty. Acting upon the impulse of this passion, he (the savage) began to hit himself severe thumps in the chest, and to exhibit other indications of being desperately in love, which, being rather a prosy proceeding, was very likely the cause of the maiden's falling asleep; whether it was or no, asleep she did fall, sound as a church, on a sloping bank, and the savage, perceiving it, leant his left ear on his left hand, and nodded sideways, to intimate to all whom it might concern that she *was* asleep, and no shamming. Being left to himself, the savage had a dance all alone. Just as he left off, the maiden woke up, rubbed her eyes, got off the bank, and had a dance all alone too—such a dance that the

savage looked on in ecstasy all the while, and, when it was done, plucked from a neighbouring tree some botanical curiosity, resembling a small pickled cabbage, and offered it to the maiden, who at first wouldn't have it, but, on the savage shedding tears, relented. Then the savage jumped for joy; then the maiden jumped for rapture at the sweet smell of the pickled cabbage. Then the savage and the maiden danced violently together, and, finally, the savage dropped down on one knee, and the maiden stood on one leg upon his other knee; thus concluding the ballet, and leaving the spectators in a state of pleasing uncertainty whether she would ultimately marry the savage, or return to her friends.

"Very well indeed," said Mr. Crummles; "bravo!"

"Bravo!" cried Nicholas, resolved to make the best of everything. "Beautiful!"

"This, sir," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, bringing the maiden forward, "this is the infant phenomenon—Miss Ninetta Crummles."

"Your daughter?" inquired Nicholas.

"My daughter—my daughter," replied Mr. Vincent Crummles; "the idol of every place we go into, sir. We have had complimentary letters about this girl, sir, from the nobility and gentry of almost every town in England."

"I am not surprised at that," said Nicholas; "she must be quite a natural genius."

"Quite a——!" Mr. Crummles stopped: language was not powerful enough to describe the infant phenomenon. "I'll tell you what, sir," he said; "the talent of this child is not to be imagined. She must be seen, sir—seen—to be ever so faintly appreciated. There! go to your mother, my dear."

"May I ask how old she is?" inquired Nicholas.

"You may, sir," replied Mr. Crummles, looking steadily in his questioner's face, as some men do when they have doubts about being implicitly believed in what they are going to say. "She is ten years of age, sir."

"Not more?"

"Not a day."

"Dear me," said Nicholas, "it's extraordinary."

It was; for the infant phenomenon, though of short stature, had a comparatively aged countenance, and had, moreover, been precisely the same age—not, perhaps, to the full extent of the memory of the oldest inhabitant, but certainly for five good years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the infant phenomenon these additional phenomena.

While this short dialogue was going on, the gentleman who had enacted the savage came up, with his walking shoes on his feet, and his slippers in his hand, to within a few paces, as if desirous to join in the conversation. Deeming this a good opportunity, he put in his word.

"Talent there, sir!" said the savage, nodding towards Miss Crummles.

Nicholas assented.

"Ah!" said the actor, setting his teeth together, and drawing in his breath with a hissing sound, "she oughtn't to be in the provinces, she oughtn't."

"What do you mean?" asked the manager.

"I mean to say," replied the other warmly, "that she is too good for country boards, and that she ought to be in one of the large houses in London, or nowhere; and I tell you more, without mincing the matter, that if it wasn't for envy and jealousy in some quarter that you know of, she would be. Perhaps you'll introduce me here, Mr. Crummles."

"Mr. Folair," said the manager, presenting him to Nicholas.

"Happy to know you, sir." Mr. Folair touched the brim of his hat with his forefinger, and then shook hands. "A recruit, sir, I understand?"

"An unworthy one," replied Nicholas.

"Did you ever see such a set-out as that?" whispered the actor, drawing him away, as Crummles left them to speak to his wife.

"As what?"

Mr. Folair made a funny face from his pantomime collection, and pointed over his shoulder.

"You don't mean the infant phenomenon?"

"Infant humbug, sir!" replied Mr. Folair. "There isn't a female child of common sharpness in a charity school that couldn't do better than that. She may thank her stars she was born a manager's daughter."

"You seem to take it to heart," observed Nicholas with a smile.

"Yes, by Jove, and well I may," said Mr. Folair, drawing his arm through his, and walking him up and down the stage. "Isn't it enough to make a man crusty to see that little sprawler put up in the best business every night, and actually keeping money out of the house, by being forced down the people's throats, while other people are passed over? Isn't it extraordinary to see a man's confounded family conceit blinding him, even to his own interest? Why, I *know* of fifteen-and-sixpence that came to

Southampton one night last month, to see me dance the Highland Fling; and what's the consequence? I've never been put up in it since—never once—while the 'infant phenomenon' has been grinning through artificial flowers at five people and a baby in the pit, and two boys in the gallery, every night."

"If I may judge from what I have seen of you," said Nicholas, "you must be a valuable member of the company."

"Oh!" replied Mr. Folair, beating his slippers together to knock the dust out; "I *can* come it pretty well—nobody better, perhaps, in my own line—but having such business as one gets here is like putting lead on one's feet instead of chalk, and dancing in fetters without the credit of it. Holloa, old fellow, how are you?"

The gentleman addressed in these latter words was a dark-complexioned man, inclining, indeed, to sallow, with long thick black hair, and very evident indications (although he was close shaved) of a stiff beard, and whiskers of the

THE INDIAN SAVAGE AND THE MAIDEN.

same deep shade. His age did not appear to exceed thirty, though many at first sight would have considered him much older, as his face was long, and very pale, from the constant application of stage paint. He wore a checked shirt, an old green coat with new gilt buttons, a neckerchief of broad red and green stripes, and full blue trousers; he carried, too, a common ash walking-stick, apparently more for show than use, as he flourished it about, with the hooked end downwards, except when he raised it for a few seconds, and, throwing himself into a fencing attitude, made a pass or two at the side-scenes, or at any other object, animate or inanimate, that chanced to afford him a pretty good mark at the moment.

"Well, Tommy," said this gentleman, making a thrust at his friend, who parried it dexterously with his slipper, "what's the news?"

"A new appearance, that's all," replied Mr. Folair, looking at Nicholas.

"Do the honours, Tommy, do the honours,"

said the other gentleman, tapping him reproachfully on the crown of the hat with his stick.

"This is Mr. Lenville, who does our first tragedy, Mr. Johnson," said the pantomimist.

"Except when old bricks and mortar takes it into his head to do it himself, you should add, Tommy," remarked Mr. Lenville. "You know who bricks and mortar is, I suppose, sir?"

"I do not, indeed," replied Nicholas.

"We call Crummles that, because his style of acting is rather in the heavy and ponderous way," said Mr. Lenville. "I mustn't be cracking jokes, though, for I've got a part of twelve lengths here, which I must be up in to-morrow night, and I haven't had time to look at it yet. I'm a confounded quick study, that's one comfort."

Consoling himself with this reflection, Mr. Lenville drew from his coat pocket a greasy and crumpled manuscript, and, having made another pass at his friend, proceeded to walk to and fro, conning it to himself, and indulging occasionally in such appropriate action as his imagination and the text suggested.

A pretty general muster of the company had by this time taken place; for, besides Mr. Lenville and his friend Tommy, there were present a slim young gentleman with weak eyes, who played the low-spirited lovers and sang tenor songs, and who had come arm-in-arm with the comic countryman—a man with a turned-up nose, large mouth, broad face, and staring eyes. Making himself very amiable to the infant phenomenon was an inebriated elderly gentleman in the last depths of shabbiness, who played the calm and virtuous old men; and paying especial court to Mrs. Crummles was another elderly gentleman, a shade more respectable, who played the irascible old men—those funny fellows who have nephews in the army, and perpetually run about with thick sticks to compel them to marry heiresses. Besides these, there was a roving-looking person in a rough great-coat, who strode up and down in front of the lamps flourishing a dress-cane, and rattling away, in an under-tone, with great vivacity for the amusement of an ideal audience. He was not quite so young as he had been, and his figure was rather running to seed; but there was an air of exaggerated gentility about him, which bespoke the hero of swaggering comedy. There was, also, a little group of three or four young men with lantern jaws and thick eyebrows, who were conversing in one corner; but they seemed to be of secondary importance, and laughed and talked together without attracting any attention.

The ladies were gathered in a little knot by themselves round the rickety table before mentioned. There was Miss Snevellicci—who could do anything, from a medley dance to Lady Macbeth, and also always played some part in blue silk knee-smalls at her benefit—glancing, from the depths of her coal-scuttle straw bonnet, at Nicholas, and affecting to be absorbed in the recital of a diverting story to her friend Miss Ledrook, who had brought her work, and was making up a ruff in the most natural manner possible. There was Miss Belvawney—who seldom aspired to speaking parts, and usually went on as a page in white silk hose, to stand with one leg bent, and contemplate the audience, or to go in and out after Mr. Crummles in stately tragedy—twisting up the ringlets of the beautiful Miss Bravassa, who had once had her likeness taken "in character" by an engraver's apprentice, whereof impressions were hung up for sale in the pastrycook's window, and the greengrocer's, and at the circulating library, and the box office, whenever the announce bills came out for her annual night. There was Mrs. Lenville, in a very limp bonnet and veil, decidedly in that way in which she would wish to be if she truly loved Mr. Lenville; there was Miss Gazingi, within an imitation ermine boa tied in a loose knot round her neck, flogging Mr. Crummles, junior, with both ends, in fun. Lastly, there was Mrs. Grudden in a brown cloth pelisse and a beaver bonnet, who assisted Mrs. Crummles in her domestic affairs, and took money at the doors, and dressed the ladies, and swept the house, and held the prompt-book when everybody else was on for the last scene, and acted any kind of part on any emergency without ever learning it, and was put down in the bills under any name or names whatever that occurred to Mr. Crummles as looking well in print.

Mr. Folair, having obligingly confided these particulars to Nicholas, left him to mingle with his fellows; the work of personal introduction was completed by Mr. Vincent Crummles, who publicly heralded the new actor as a prodigy of genius and learning.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Snevellicci, sidling towards Nicholas, "but did you ever play at Canterbury?"

"I never did," replied Nicholas.

"I recollect meeting a gentleman at Canterbury," said Miss Snevellicci, "only for a few moments, for I was leaving the company as he joined it, so like you that I felt almost certain it was the same."

"I see you now for the first time," rejoined Nicholas with all due gallantry. "I am sure I never saw you before; I could'nt have forgotten it."

"Oh! I'm sure—it's very flattering of you to say so," retorted Miss Snevellicci with a graceful bend. "Now I look at you again, I see that the gentleman at Canterbury hadn't the same eyes as you. You'll think me very foolish for taking notice of such things, won't you?"

"Not at all," said Nicholas. "How can I feel otherwise than flattered by your notice in any way?"

"Oh! you men are such vain creatures!" cried Miss Snevellicci. Whereupon she became charmingly confused, and, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief from a faded pink silk reticule with a gilt clasp, called to Miss Ledrook—

"Led, my dear," said Miss Snevellicci.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Miss Ledrook.

"It's not the same."

"Not the same what?"

"Canterbury—you know what I mean. Come here! I want to speak to you."

But Miss Ledrook wouldn't come to Miss Snevellicci, so Miss Snevellicci was obliged to go to Miss Ledrook, which she did in a skipping manner that was quite fascinating; and Miss Ledrook evidently joked Miss Snevellicci about being struck with Nicholas; for, after some playful whispering, Miss Snevellicci hit Miss Ledrook very hard on the backs of her hands, and retired up, in a state of pleasing confusion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, who had been writing on a piece of paper, "we'll call the Mortal Struggle to-morrow at ten; everybody for the procession. Intrigue, and Ways and Means, you're all up in, so we shall only want one rehearsal. Everybody at ten, if you please."

"Everybody at ten," repeated Mrs. Grudden, looking about her.

"On Monday morning we shall read a new piece," said Mr. Crummles; "the name's not known yet, but everybody will have a good part. Mr. Johnson will take care of that."

"Hallo!" said Nicholas, starting, "I——"

"On Monday morning," repeated Mr. Crummles, raising his voice to drown the unfortunate Mr. Johnson's remonstrance; "that'll do, ladies and gentlemen."

The ladies and gentlemen required no second notice to quit; and, in a few minutes, the theatre was deserted, save by the Crummles family, Nicholas, and Smike.

"Upon my word," said Nicholas, taking the manager aside, "I don't think I can be ready by Monday."

"Pooh, pooh!" replied Mr. Crummles.

"But really I can't," returned Nicholas; "my invention is not accustomed to these demands, or possibly I might produce——"

"Invention! What the devil's that got to do with it?" cried the manager hastily.

"Everything, my dear sir."

"Nothing, my dear sir," retorted the manager with evident impatience. "Do you understand French?"

"Perfectly well."

"Very good," said the manager, opening the table drawer, and giving a roll of paper from it to Nicholas. "There! Just turn that into English, and put your name on the title-page. Damn me," said Mr. Crummles angrily, "if I haven't often said that I wouldn't have a man or woman in my company that wasn't master of the language, so that they might learn it from the original, and play it in English, and save all this trouble and expense!"

Nicholas smiled, and pocketed the play.

"What are you going to do about your lodgings?" said Mr. Crummles.

Nicholas could not help thinking that, for the first week, it would be an uncommon convenience to have a turn-up bedstead in the pit, but he merely remarked that he had not turned his thoughts that way.

"Come home with me, then," said Mr. Crummles, "and my boys shall go with you after dinner, and show you the most likely place."

The offer was not to be refused; Nicholas and Mr. Crummles gave Mrs. Crummles an arm each, and walked up the street in stately array. Smike, the boys, and the phenomenon went home by a shorter cut, and Mrs. Grudden remained behind to take some cold Irish stew and a pint of porter in the box office.

Mrs. Crummles trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution with an animating consciousness of innocence, and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires. Mr. Crummles, on the other hand, assumed the look and gait of a hardened despot; but they both attracted some notice from many of the passers-by, and when they heard a whisper of "Mr. and Mrs. Crummles!" or saw a little boy run back to stare them in the face, the severe expression of their countenances relaxed, for they felt it was popularity.

Mr. Crummles lived in St. Thomas's Street, at the house of one Bulph, a pilot, who sported a boat-green door, with window frames of the same colour, and had the little finger of a drowned man on his parlour mantel-shelf, with other maritime and natural curiosities. He dis-

played also a brass knocker, a brass plate, and a brass bell-handle, all very bright and shining; and had a mast, with a vane on the top of it, in his back-yard.

"You are welcome," said Mrs. Crummles, turning round to Nicholas when they reached the bow-windowed front room on the first floor.

Nicholas bowed his acknowledgments, and was unfeignedly glad to see the cloth laid.

"We have but a shoulder of mutton with onion sauce," said Mrs. Crummles in the same charnel-house voice; "but, such as our dinner is, we beg you to partake of it."

"You are very good," replied Nicholas; "I shall do it ample justice."

"Vincent," said Mrs. Crummles, "what is the hour?"

"Five minutes past dinner-time," said Mr. Crummles.

Mrs. Crummles rang the bell. "Let the mutton and onion sauce appear."

The slave who attended upon Mr. Bulph's lodgers disappeared, and, after a short interval, reappeared with the festive banquet. Nicholas and the infant phenomenon opposed each other at the pembroke table, and Smike and the Master Crummleses dined on the sofa-bedstead.

"Are they very theatrical people here?" asked Nicholas.

"No," replied Mr. Crummles, shaking his head, "far from it—far from it."

"I pity them," observed Mrs. Crummles.

"So do I," said Nicholas; "if they have no relish for theatrical entertainments, properly conducted."

"Then they have none, sir," rejoined Mr. Crummles. "To the infant's benefit, last year, on which occasion she repeated three of her most popular characters, and also appeared in the Fairy Porcupine, as originally performed by her, there was a house of no more than four pound twelve."

"Is it possible?" cried Nicholas.

"And two pound of that was trust, pa," said the phenomenon.

"And two pound of that was trust," repeated Mr. Crummles. "Mrs. Crummles herself has played to mere handfuls."

"But they are always a taking audience, Vincent," said the manager's wife.

"Most audiences are when they have good acting—real good acting—the regular thing," replied Mr. Crummles forcibly.

"Do you give lessons, ma'am?" inquired Nicholas.

"I do," said Mrs. Crummles.

"There is no teaching here, I suppose?"

"There has been," said Mrs. Crummles. "I have received pupils here. I imparted tuition to the daughter of a dealer in ships' provision; but it afterwards appeared that she was insane when she first came to me. It was very extraordinary that she should come under such circumstances."

Not feeling quite so sure of that, Nicholas thought it best to hold his peace.

"Let me see," said the manager, cogitating after dinner. "Would you like some nice little part with the infant?"

"You are very good," replied Nicholas hastily; "but I think perhaps it would be better if I had somebody of my own size at first, in case I should turn out awkward. I should feel more at home, perhaps."

"True," said the manager. "Perhaps you would. And you could play up to the infant in time, you know."

"Certainly," replied Nicholas: devoutly hoping that it would be a very long time before he was honoured with this distinction.

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do," said Mr. Crummles. "You shall study Romeo when you've done that piece—don't forget to throw the pump and tubs in, by-the-bye—Juliet Miss Snevellicci, old Grudden the nurse.—Yes, that'll do very well. Rover, too;—you might get up Rover while you were about it, and Cassio, and Jeremy Diddler. You can easily knock them off; one part helps the other so much. Here they are, cues and all."

With these hasty general directions Mr. Crummles thrust a number of little books into the faltering hands of Nicholas, and bidding his eldest son go with him, and show where lodgings were to be had, shook him by the hand, and wished him good night.

There is no lack of comfortable furnished apartments in Portsmouth, and no difficulty in finding some that are proportionate to very slender finances; but the former were too good, and the latter too bad, and they went into so many houses, and came out unsuited, that Nicholas seriously began to think he should be obliged to ask permission to spend the night in the theatre, after all.

Eventually, however, they stumbled upon two small rooms up three pair of stairs, or rather two pair and a ladder, at a tobacconist's shop, on the Common Hard: a dirty street leading down to the dockyard. These Nicholas engaged, only too happy to have escaped any request for payment of a week's rent beforehand.

"There! Lay down our personal property,

Smike," he said after showing young Crummles down-stairs. "We have fallen upon strange times, and Heaven only knows the end of them; but I am tired with the events of these three days, and will postpone reflection till to-morrow—if I can."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF THE GREAT BESPEAK FOR MISS SNEVELLICCI, AND THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF NICHOLAS UPON ANY STAGE.

NICHOLAS was up betimes in the morning; but he had scarcely begun to dress, notwithstanding, when he heard footsteps ascending the stairs, and was presently saluted by the voices of Mr. Folair the pantomimist, and Mr. Lenville the tragedian.

"House, house, house!" cried Mr. Folair.

"What, ho! within there!" said Mr. Lenville in a deep voice.

"Confound these fellows!" thought Nicholas; "they have come to breakfast, I suppose. I'll open the door directly, if you'll wait an instant."

The gentlemen entreated him not to hurry himself; and, to beguile the interval, had a fencing bout with their walking-sticks on the very small landing-place: to the unspeakable discomposure of all the other lodgers down-stairs.

"Here, come in," said Nicholas when he had completed his toilet. "In the name of all that's horrible, don't make that noise outside."

"An uncommon snug little box this," said Mr. Lenville, stepping into the front room, and taking his hat off, before he could get in at all. "Pernicious snug."

"For a man at all particular in such matters, it might be a trifle too snug," said Nicholas; "for, although it is, undoubtedly, a great convenience to be able to reach anything you want from the ceiling or the floor, or either side of the room, without having to move from your chair, still these advantages can only be had in an apartment of the most limited size."

"It isn't a bit too confined for a single man," returned Mr. Lenville. "That reminds me,—my wife, Mr. Johnson,—I hope she'll have some good part in this piece of yours?"

"I glanced at the French copy last night," said Nicholas. "It looks very good, I think."

"What do you mean to do for me, old fellow?" asked Mr. Lenville, poking the struggling fire with his walking-stick, and afterwards wiping it on the skirt of his coat. "Anything in the gruff and grumble way?"

"You turn your wife and child out of doors," said Nicholas; "and, in a fit of rage and jealousy, stab your eldest son in the library."

"Do I, though!" exclaimed Mr. Lenville. "That's very good business."

"After which," said Nicholas, "you are troubled with remorse till the last act, and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But, just as you are raising the pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten."

"I see," cried Mr. Lenville. "Very good."

"You pause," said Nicholas; "you recollect to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand—you are overcome—you burst into tears, and become a virtuous and exemplary character for ever afterwards."

"Capital!" said Mr. Lenville: "that's a sure card, a sure card. Get the curtain down with a touch of nature like that, and it'll be a triumphant success."

"Is there anything good for me?" inquired Mr. Folair anxiously.

"Let me see," said Nicholas. "You play the faithful and attached servant; you are turned out of doors with the wife and child."

"Always coupled with that infernal phenomenon," sighed Mr. Folair; "and we go into poor lodgings, where I won't take any wages, and talk sentiment, I suppose?"

"Why—yes," replied Nicholas: "that is the course of the piece."

"I must have a dance of some kind, you know," said Mr. Folair. "You'll have to introduce one for the phenomenon, so you'd better make a *pas de deux*, and save time."

"There's nothing easier than that," said Mr. Lenville, observing the disturbed looks of the young dramatist.

"Upon my word I don't see how it's to be done," rejoined Nicholas.

"Why, isn't it obvious?" reasoned Mr. Lenville. "Gadzooks, who can help seeing the way to do it? You astonish me! You get the distressed lady, and the little child, and the attached servant into the poor lodgings, don't you?—Well, look here. The distressed lady sinks into a chair, and buries her face in her pocket-handkerchief. 'What makes you weep, mamma?' says the child. 'Don't weep, mamma, or you'll make me weep too!'—'And me!' says the favourite servant, rubbing his eyes with his arm. 'What can we do to raise your spirits, dear mamma?' says the little child. 'Ay, what

can we do?' says the faithful servant. 'Oh, Pierre!' says the distressed lady; 'would that I could shake off these painful thoughts!'—'Try, ma'am, try,' says the faithful servant; 'rouse yourself, ma'am; be amused.'—'I will,' says the lady; 'I will learn to suffer with fortitude. Do you remember that dance, my honest friend, which, in happier days, you practised with this sweet angel? It never failed to calm my spirits then. Oh! let me see it once again before I die!'—There it is—cue for the band, *before I die*,—and off they go. That's the regular thing; isn't it, Tommy?"

"That's it," replied Mr. Folair. "The distressed lady, overpowered by old recollections, faints at the end of the dance, and you close in with a picture."

Profiting by these and other lessons, which were the result of the personal experience of the two actors, Nicholas willingly gave them the best breakfast he could, and, when he at length got rid of them, applied himself to his task: by no means displeased to find that it was so much easier than he had at first supposed. He worked very hard all day, and did not leave his room until the evening, when he went down to the theatre, whither Smike had repaired before him to go on with another gentleman as a general rebellion.

Here all the people were so much changed, that he scarcely knew them. False hair, false colour, false calves, false muscles—they had become different beings. Mr. Lenville was a blooming warrior of most exquisite proportions; Mr. Crummles, his large face shaded by a profusion of black hair, a Highland outlaw of most majestic bearing; one of the old gentlemen a gaoler, and the other a venerable patriarch; the comic countryman, a fighting-man of great valour, relieved by a touch of humour; each of the Master Crummleses a prince in his own right; and the low-spirited lover a desponding captive. There was a gorgeous banquet ready spread for the third act, consisting of two pasteboard vases, one plate of biscuits, a black bottle, and a vinegar cruet; and, in short, everything was on a scale of the utmost splendour and preparation.

Nicholas was standing with his back to the curtain, now contemplating the first scene, which was a Gothic archway, about two feet shorter than Mr. Crummles, through which that gentleman was to make his first entrance, and now listening to a couple of people who were cracking nuts in the gallery, wondering whether they made the whole audience, when the manager himself walked familiarly up and accosted him.

"Been in front to-night?" said Mr. Crummles.

"No," replied Nicholas, "not yet. I am going to see the play."

"We've had a pretty good Let," said Mr. Crummles. "Four front places in the centre, and the whole of the stage box."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nicholas; "a family, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Crummles, "yes. It's an affecting thing. There are six children, and they never come unless the phenomenon plays."

It would have been difficult for any party, family or otherwise, to have visited the theatre on a night when the phenomenon did *not* play, inasmuch as she always sustained one, and not uncommonly two or three, characters, every night; but Nicholas, sympathising with the feelings of a father, refrained from hinting at this trifling circumstance, and Mr. Crummles continued to talk, uninterrupted by him.

"Six," said that gentleman; "pa and ma eight, aunt nine, governess ten, grandfather and grandmother twelve. Then there's the footman, who stands outside, with a bag of oranges and a jug of toast-and-water, and sees the play for nothing through the little pane of glass in the box door. It's cheap at a guinea; they gain by taking a box."

"I wonder you allow so many," observed Nicholas.

"There's no help for it," replied Mr. Crummles; "it's always expected in the country. If there are six children, six people come to hold them in their laps. A family box carries double always. Ring in the orchestra, Grudden!"

That useful lady did as she was requested, and shortly afterwards the tuning of three fiddles was heard. Which process, having been protracted as long as it was supposed that the patience of the audience could possibly bear it, was put a stop to by another jerk of the bell, which, being the signal to begin in earnest, set the orchestra playing a variety of popular airs, with involuntary variations.

If Nicholas had been astonished at the alteration for the better which the gentlemen displayed, the transformation of the ladies was still more extraordinary. When, from a snug corner of the manager's box, he beheld Miss Snevellicci in all the glories of white muslin with a golden hem, and Mrs. Crummles in all the dignity of the outlaw's wife, and Miss Bravassa in all the sweetness of Miss Snevellicci's confidential friend, and Miss Belvawney in the white silks of a page doing duty everywhere, and swearing to live and die in the service of everybody, he could scarcely contain his admiration,

which testified itself in great applause, and the closest possible attention to the business of the scene. The plot was most interesting. It belonged to no particular age, people, or country, and was, perhaps, the more delightful on that account, as nobody's previous information could afford the remotest glimmering of what would ever come of it. An outlaw had been very successful in doing something somewhere, and came home in triumph, to the sound of shouts and fiddles, to greet his wife—a lady of masculine mind, who talked a good deal about her father's bones, which it seemed were unburied, though whether from a peculiar taste on the part of the old gentleman himself, or the reprehensible neglect of his relations, did not appear. This outlaw's wife was, somehow or other, mixed up with a patriarch, living in a castle a long way off, and this patriarch was the father of several of the characters, but he didn't exactly know which, and was uncertain whether he had brought up the right ones in his castle, or the wrong ones; he rather inclined to the latter opinion, and, being uneasy, relieved his mind with a banquet, during which solemnity somebody in a cloak said "Beware!" which somebody was known by nobody (except the audience) to be the outlaw himself, who had come there for reasons unexplained, but possibly with an eye to the spoons. There was an agreeable little surprise in the way of certain love passages between the desponding captive and Miss Snevellicci, and the comic fighting-man and Miss Bravassa; besides which, Mr. Lenville had several very tragic scenes in the dark, while on throat-cutting expeditions, which were all baffled by the skill and bravery of the comic fighting-man (who overheard whatever was said all through the piece) and the intrepidity of Miss Snevellicci, who adopted tights, and therein repaired to the prison of her captive lover, with a small basket of refreshments and a dark lantern. At last, it came out that the patriarch was the man who had treated the bones of the outlaw's father-in-law with so much disrespect, for which cause and reason the outlaw's wife repaired to his castle to kill him, and so got into a dark room, where, after a good deal of groping in the dark, everybody got hold of everybody else, and took them for somebody besides, which occasioned a vast quantity of confusion, with some pistoling, loss of life, and torch-light; after which the patriarch came forward, and observing, with a knowing look, that he knew all about his children now, and would tell them when they got inside, said that there could not be a more appropriate occasion for marrying the young people than that; and therefore he joined their hands, with the full consent of the indefatigable page, who (being the only other person surviving) pointed with his cap into the clouds, and his right hand to the ground; thereby invoking a blessing, and giving the cue for the curtain to come down, which it did amidst general applause.

"What did you think of that?" asked Mr. Crummles when Nicholas went round to the stage again. Mr. Crummles was very red and hot, for your outlaws are desperate fellows to shout.

"I think it was very capital indeed," replied Nicholas; "Miss Snevellicei, in particular, was uncommonly good."

"She's a genius," said Mr. Crummles; "quite a genius, that girl. By-the-bye, I've been thinking of bringing out that piece of yours on her bespeak night."

"When?" asked Nicholas.

"The night of her bespeak. Her benefit night, when her friends and patrons bespeak the play," said Mr. Crummles.

"Oh! I understand," replied Nicholas.

"You see," said Mr. Crummles, "it's sure to go on such an occasion, and even if it should not work up quite as well as we expect, why it will be her risk, you know, and not ours."

"Yours, you mean," said Nicholas.

"I said mine, didn't I?" returned Mr. Crummles. "Next Monday week. What do you say? You'll have done it, and are sure to be up in the lover's part, long before that time."

"I don't know about 'long before,'" replied Nicholas; "but *by* that time I think I can undertake to be ready."

"Very good," pursued Mr. Crummles; "then we'll call that settled. Now, I want to ask you something else. There's a little—what shall I call it?—a little canvassing takes place on these occasions."

"Among the patrons, I suppose?" said Nicholas.

"Among the patrons; and the fact is, that Snevellicci has had so many bespeaks in this place, that she wants an attraction. She had a bespeak when her mother-in-law died, and a bespeak when her uncle died; and Mrs. Crummles and myself have had bespeaks on the anniversary of the phenomenon's birthday, and our wedding-day, and occasions of that description, so that, in fact, there's some difficulty in getting a good one. Now, won't you help this poor girl, Mr. Johnson?" said Crummles, sitting himself down on a drum, and taking a great pinch of snuff, as he looked him steadily in the face.

"How do you mean?" rejoined Nicholas.

"Don't you think you could spare half an hour to-morrow morning, to call with her at the houses of one or two of the principal people?" murmured the manager in a persuasive tone.

"Oh dear me!" said Nicholas with an air of very strong objection, "I shouldn't like to do that."

"The infant will accompany her," said Mr. Crummles. "The moment it was suggested to me, I gave permission for the infant to go. There will not be the smallest impropriety—Miss Snevellicci, sir, is the very soul of honour. It would be of material service—the gentleman from London—author of the new piece—actor in the new piece—first appearance on any boards—it would lead to a great bespeak, Mr. Johnson."

"I am very sorry to throw a damp upon the prospects of anybody, and more especially a lady," replied Nicholas; "but really I must decidedly object to making one of the canvassing party."

"What does Mr. Johnson say, Vincent?" inquired a voice close to his ear; and, looking round, he found Mrs. Crummles and Miss Snevellicci herself standing behind him.

"He has some objection, my dear," replied Mr. Crummles, looking at Nicholas.

"Objection!" exclaimed Mrs. Crummles. "Can it be possible?"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Miss Snevellicci. "You surely are not so cruel—oh dear me!—Well, I—to think of that, now, after all one's looking forward to it!"

"Mr. Johnson will not persist, my dear," said Mrs. Crummles. "Think better of him than to suppose it. Gallantry, humanity, all the best feelings of his nature, must be enlisted in this interesting cause."

"Which moves even a manager," said Mr. Crummles, smiling.

"And a manager's wife," added Mrs. Crummles in her accustomed tragedy tones. "Come, come, you will relent, I know you will."

"It is not in my nature," said Nicholas, moved by these appeals, "to resist any entreaty, unless it is to do something positively wrong; and, beyond a feeling of pride, I know nothing which should prevent my doing this. I know nobody here, and nobody knows me. So be it, then. I yield."

Miss Snevellicci was at once overwhelmed with blushes and expressions of gratitude, of which latter commodity neither Mr. nor Mrs. Crummles was by any means sparing. It was arranged that Nicholas should call upon her, at her lodgings, at eleven next morning, and soon after they parted: he to return home to his authorship; Miss Snevellicci to dress for the after-piece; and the disinterested manager and his wife to discuss the probable gains of the forthcoming bespeak, of which they were to have two-thirds of the profits by solemn treaty of agreement.

At the stipulated hour next morning, Nicholas repaired to the lodgings of Miss Snevellicci, which were in a place called Lombard Street, at the house of a tailor. A strong smell of ironing pervaded the little passage; and the tailor's daughter, who opened the door, appeared in that flutter of spirits which is so often attendant upon the periodical getting-up of a family's linen.

"Miss Snevellicci lives here, I believe?" said Nicholas when the door was opened.

The tailor's daughter replied in the affirmative.

"Will you have the goodness to let her know that Mr. Johnson is here?" said Nicholas.

"Oh! if you please, you're to come up-stairs," replied the tailor's daughter with a smile.

Nicholas followed the young lady, and was shown into a small apartment on the first floor, communicating with a back-room: in which, as he judged from a certain half-subdued clinking sound, as of cups and saucers, Miss Snevellicci was then taking her breakfast in bed.

"You're to wait, if you please," said the tailor's daughter after a short period of absence, during which the clinking in the back-room had ceased, and been succeeded by whispering—"she won't be long."

As she spoke, she pulled up the window blind, and having by this means (as she thought) diverted Mr. Johnson's attention from the room to the street, caught up some articles which were airing on the fender, and had very much the appearance of stockings, and darted off.

As there were not many objects of interest outside the window, Nicholas looked about the room with more curiosity than he might otherwise have bestowed upon it. On the sofa lay an old guitar, several thumbed pieces of music, and a scattered litter of curl-papers: together with a confused heap of play-bills, and a pair of soiled white satin shoes with large blue rosettes. Hanging over the back of a chair was a half-finished muslin apron, with little pockets ornamented with red ribbons, such as waiting-women wear on the stage, and (by consequence) are never seen with anywhere else. In one corner stood the diminutive pair of top-boots in which Miss Snevellicci was accustomed to enact the little jockey, and, folded on a chair hard by,

was a small parcel, which bore a very suspicious resemblance to the companion smalls.

But the most interesting object of all was, perhaps, the open scrap-book, displayed in the midst of some theatrical duodecimos that were strewn upon the table; and pasted into which scrap-book were various critical notices of Miss Snevellicci's acting, extracted from different provincial journals, together with one poetic address in her honour, commencing—

"Sing, God of Love, and tell me in what dearth
Thrice-gifted SNEVELLICCI came on earth,
To thrill us with her smile, her tear, her eye,
Sing, God of Love, and tell me quickly why."

Besides this effusion, there were innumerable complimentary allusions, also extracted from newspapers, such as—"We observe, from an advertisement in another part of our paper of to-day, that the charming and highly-talented Miss Snevellicci takes her benefit on Wednesday, for which occasion she has put forth a bill of fare that might kindle exhilaration in the breast of a misanthrope. In the confidence that our fellow-townsmen have not lost that high appreciation of public utility and private worth for which they have long been so pre-eminently distinguished, we predict that this charming actress will be greeted with a bumper." "To Correspondents. —J. S. is misinformed when he supposes that the highly-gifted and beautiful Miss Snevellicci, nightly captivating all hearts at our pretty and commodious little theatre, is *not* the same lady to whom the young gentleman of immense fortune, residing within a hundred miles of the good city of York, lately made honourable proposals. We have reason to know that Miss Snevellicci *is* the lady who was implicated in that mysterious and romantic affair, and whose conduct on that occasion did no less honour to her head and heart than do her histrionic triumphs to her brilliant genius." A copious assortment of such paragraphs as these, with long bills of benefits all ending with "Come Early," in large capitals, formed the principal contents of Miss Snevellicci's scrap-book.

Nicholas had read a great many of these scraps, and was absorbed in a circumstantial and melancholy account of the train of events which had led to Miss Snevellicci's spraining her ankle by slipping on a piece of orange-peel flung by a monster in human form (so the paper said) upon the stage at Winchester, when that young lady herself, attired in the coal-scuttle bonnet and walking dress complete, tripped into the room, with a thousand apologies for having detained him so long after the appointed time.

"But really," said Miss Snevellicci, "my darling Led, who lives with me here, was taken so very ill in the night that I thought she would have expired in my arms."

"Such a fate is almost to be envied," returned Nicholas; "but I am very sorry to hear it, nevertheless."

"What a creature you are to flatter!" said Miss Snevellicci, buttoning her glove in much confusion.

"If it be flattery to admire your charms and accomplishments," rejoined Nicholas, laying his hand upon the scrap-book, "you have better specimens of it here."

"Oh, you cruel creature, to read such things as those! I'm almost ashamed to look you in the face afterwards, positively I am," said Miss Snevellicci, seizing the book, and putting it away in a closet. "How careless of Led! How could she be so naughty?"

"I thought you had kindly left it here, on purpose for me to read," said Nicholas. And really it did seem possible.

"I wouldn't have had you see it for the world!" rejoined Miss Snevellicci. "I never was so vexed—never! But she is such a careless thing, there's no trusting her."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the phenomenon, who had discreetly remained in the bedroom up to this moment, and now presented herself, with much grace and lightness, bearing in her hand a very little green parasol with a broad fringe border, and no handle. After a few words of course, they sallied into the street.

The phenomenon was rather a troublesome companion, for first the right sandal came down, and then the left, and these mischances being repaired, one leg of the little white trousers was discovered to be longer than the other; besides these accidents, the green parasol was dropped down an iron grating, and only fished up again with great difficulty, and by dint of much exertion. However, it was impossible to scold her, as she was the manager's daughter, so Nicholas took it all in perfect good-humour, and walked on, with Miss Snevellicci, arm-in-arm on one side, and the offending infant on the other.

The first house to which they bent their steps was situated in a terrace of respectable appearance. Miss Snevellicci's modest double knock was answered by a footboy, who, in reply to her inquiry whether Mrs. Curdle was at home, opened his eyes very wide, grinned very much, and said he didn't know, but he'd inquire. With this he showed them into a parlour, where he kept them waiting until the two women-servants had repaired thither, under false pretences, to

see the play-actors; and having compared notes with them in the passage, and joined in a vast quantity of whispering and giggling, he at length went up-stairs with Miss Snevellicci's name.

Now, Mrs. Curdle was supposed, by those who were best informed on such points, to possess quite the London taste in matters relating to literature and the drama; and as to Mr. Curdle, he had written a pamphlet of sixty-four pages, post octavo, on the character of the Nurse's deceased husband in Romeo and Juliet, with an inquiry whether he really had been a "merry man" in his lifetime, or whether it was merely his widow's affectionate partiality that induced her so to report him. He had likewise proved that, by altering the received mode of punctuation, any one of Shakspeare's plays could be made quite different, and the sense completely changed; it is needless to say, therefore, that he was a great critic, and a very profound and most original thinker.

"Well, Miss Snevellicci," said Mrs. Curdle, entering the parlour, "and how do *you* do?"

Miss Snevellicci made a graceful obeisance,

"AS AN EXQUISITE EMBODIMENT OF THE POET'S VISIONS, AND A REALISATION OF HUMAN INTELLECTUALITY, GILDING WITH REFULGENT LIGHT OUR DREAMY MOMENTS, AND LAYING OPEN A NEW AND MAGIC WORLD BEFORE THE MENTAL EYE, THE DRAMA IS GONE, PERFECTLY GONE," SAID MR. CURDLE.

and hoped Mrs. Curdle was well, as also Mr. Curdle, who at the same time appeared. Mrs. Curdle was dressed in a morning wrapper, with a little cap stuck upon the top of her head. Mr. Curdle wore a loose robe on his back, and his right forefinger on his forehead, after the portraits of Sterne, to whom somebody or other had once said he bore a striking resemblance.

"I venture to call for the purpose of asking whether you would put your name to my bespeak, ma'am," said Miss Snevellicci, producing documents.

"Oh! I really don't know what to say," replied Mrs. Curdle. "It's not as if the theatre was in its high and palmy days—you needn't stand, Miss Snevellicci—the drama is gone, perfectly gone."

"As an exquisite embodiment of the poet's visions, and a realisation of human intellectuality, gilding with refulgent light our dreamy moments, and laying open a new and magic world before

the mental eye, the drama is gone, perfectly gone," said Mr. Curdle.

"What man is there, now living, who can present before us all those changing and prismatic colours with which the character of Hamlet is invested?" exclaimed Mrs. Curdle.

"What man indeed—upon the stage?" said Mr. Curdle, with a small reservation in favour of himself. "Hamlet! Pooh! ridiculous! Hamlet is gone, perfectly gone."

Quite overcome by these dismal reflections, Mr. and Mrs. Curdle sighed, and sat for some short time without speaking. At length the lady, turning to Miss Snevellicci, inquired what play she proposed to have.

"Quite a new one," said Miss Snevellicci, "of which this gentleman is the author, and in which he plays; being his first appearance on any stage. Mr. Johnson is the gentleman's name."

"I hope you have preserved the unities, sir?" said Mr. Curdle.

"The original piece is a French one," said Nicholas. "There is abundance of incident, sprightly dialogue, strongly-marked characters——"

"—All unavailing without a strict observance of the unities, sir," returned Mr. Curdle. "The unities of the drama before everything."

"Might I ask you," said Nicholas, hesitating between the respect he ought to assume, and his love of the whimsical, "might I ask you what the unities are?"

Mr. Curdle coughed and considered. "The unities, sir," he said, "are a completeness—a kind of universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time—a sort of a general oneness, if I may be allowed to use so strong an expression. I take those to be the dramatic unities, so far as I have been enabled to bestow attention upon them, and I have read much upon the subject, and thought much. I find, running through the performances of this child," said Mr. Curdle, turning to the phenomenon, "a unity of feeling, a breadth, a light and shade, a warmth of colouring, a tone, a harmony, a glow, an artistical development of original conceptions, which I look for, in vain, among older performers. I don't know whether I make myself understood?"

"Perfectly," replied Nicholas.

"Just so," said Mr. Curdle, pulling up his neckcloth. "That is my definition of the unities of the drama."

Mrs. Curdle had sat listening to this lucid explanation with great complacency. It being finished, she inquired what Mr. Curdle thought about putting down their names.

"I don't know, my dear; upon my word I don't know," said Mr. Curdle. "If we do, it must be distinctly understood that we do not pledge ourselves to the quality of the performances. Let it go forth to the world that we do not give *them* the sanction of our names, but that we confer the distinction merely upon Miss Snevellicci. That being clearly stated, I take it to be, as it were, a duty that we should extend our patronage to a degraded stage, even for the sake of the associations with which it is entwined. Have you got two-and-sixpence for half-a-crown, Miss Snevellicci?" said Mr. Curdle, turning over four of those pieces of money.

Miss Snevellicci felt in all the corners of the pink reticule, but there was nothing in any of them. Nicholas murmured a jest about his being an author, and thought it best not to go through the form of feeling in his own pockets at all.

"Let me see," said Mr. Curdle; "twice four's eight—four shillings apiece to the boxes, Miss Snevellicci, is exceedingly dear in the present state of the drama—three half-crowns is seven-and-six; we shall not differ about sixpence, I suppose? Sixpence will not part us, Miss Snevellicci?"

Poor Miss Snevellicci took the three half-crowns with many smiles and bends, and Mrs. Curdle, adding several supplementary directions relative to keeping the places for them, and dusting the seat, and sending two clean bills as soon as they came out, rang the bell, as a signal for breaking up the conference.

"Odd people, those," said Nicholas when they got clear of the house.

"I assure you," said Miss Snevellicci, taking his arm, "that I think myself very lucky they did not owe all the money instead of being sixpence short. Now, if you were to succeed, they would give people to understand that they had always patronised you; and, if you were to fail, they would have been quite certain of that from the very beginning."

At the next house they visited they were in great glory; for there resided the six children who were so enraptured with the public actions of the phenomenon, and who, being called down from the nursery to be treated with a private view of that young lady, proceeded to poke their fingers into her eyes, and tread upon her toes, and show her many other little attentions peculiar to their time of life.

"I shall certainly persuade Mr. Borum to take a private box," said the lady of the house after a most gracious reception. "I shall only take two of the children, and will make up the rest of the party of gentlemen—your admirers,

Miss Snevellicci. Augustus, you naughty boy, leave the little girl alone."

This was addressed to a young gentleman who was pinching the phenomenon behind, apparently with a view of ascertaining whether she was real.

"I am sure you must be very tired," said the mamma, turning to Miss Snevellicci. "I cannot think of allowing you to go without first taking a glass of wine. Fie, Charlotte, I am ashamed of you! Miss Lane, my dear, pray see to the children."

Miss Lane was the governess, and this entreaty was rendered necessary by the abrupt behaviour of the youngest Miss Borum, who, having filched the phenomenon's little green parasol, was now carrying it bodily off, while the distracted infant looked helplessly on.

"I am sure, where you ever learnt to act as you do," said good-natured Mrs. Borum, turning again to Miss Snevellicci, "I cannot understand (Emma, don't stare so); laughing in one piece, and crying in the next, and so natural in all—oh dear!"

"I am very happy to hear you express so favourable an opinion," said Miss Snevellicci. "It's quite delightful to think you like it."

"Like it!" cried Mrs. Borum. "Who can help liking it? I would go to the play twice a week if I could: I dote upon it—only you're too affecting sometimes. You do put me in such a state—into such fits of crying! Goodness gracious me, Miss Lane, how can you let them torment that poor child so?"

The phenomenon was really in a fair way of being torn limb from limb; for two strong little boys, one holding on by each of her hands, were dragging her in different directions as a trial of strength. However, Miss Lane (who had herself been too much occupied in contemplating the grown-up actors to pay the necessary attention to these proceedings) rescued the unhappy infant at this juncture, who, being recruited with a glass of wine, was shortly afterwards taken away by her friends, after sustaining no more serious damage than a flattening of the pink gauze bonnet, and a rather extensive creasing of the white frock and trousers.

It was a trying morning; for there were a great many calls to make, and everybody wanted a different thing. Some wanted tragedies, and others comedies; some objected to dancing; some wanted scarcely anything else. Some thought the comic singer decidedly low, and others hoped he would have more to do than he usually had. Some people wouldn't promise to go, because other people wouldn't promise to go; and other people wouldn't go at all, because other people went. At length, and by little and little, omitting something in this place, and adding something in that, Miss Snevellicci pledged herself to a bill of fare which was comprehensive enough, if it had no other merit (it included, among other trifles, four pieces, divers songs, a few combats, and several dances); and they returned home pretty well exhausted with the business of the day.

Nicholas worked away at the piece, which was speedily put into rehearsal, and then worked away at his own part, which he studied with great perseverance, and acted—as the whole company said—to perfection. And at length the great day arrived. The crier was sent round, in the morning, to proclaim the entertainments with the sound of bell in all the thoroughfares; and extra bills of three feet long, by nine inches wide, were dispersed in all directions, flung down all the areas, thrust under all the knockers, and developed in all the shops. They were placarded on all the walls, too, though not with complete success; for, an illiterate person having undertaken this office during the indisposition of the regular bill-sticker, a part were posted sideways, and the remainder upside down.

At half-past five there was a rush of four people to the gallery door; at a quarter before six there were at least a dozen; at six o'clock the kicks were terrific; and, when the elder Master Crummles opened the door, he was obliged to run behind it for his life. Fifteen shillings were taken by Mrs. Grudden in the first ten minutes.

Behind the scenes, the same unwonted excitement prevailed. Miss Snevellicci was in such a perspiration that the paint would scarcely stay on her face. Mrs. Crummles was so nervous that she could hardly remember her part. Miss Bravassa's ringlets came out of curl with the heat and anxiety; even Mr. Crummles himself kept peeping through the hole in the curtain, and running back, every now and then, to announce that another man had come into the pit.

At last the orchestra left off, and the curtain rose upon the new piece. The first scene, in which there was nobody particular, passed off calmly enough, but when Miss Snevellicci went on in the second, accompanied by the phenomenon as child, what a roar of applause broke out! The people in the Borum box rose as one man, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, and uttering shouts of "Bravo!" Mrs. Borum and the governess cast wreaths upon the stage, of

which, some fluttered into the lamps, and one crowned the temples of a fat gentleman in the pit, who, looking eagerly towards the scene, remained unconscious of the honour; the tailor and his family kicked at the panels of the upper boxes till they threatened to come out altogether; the very ginger-beer boy remained transfixed in the centre of the house; a young officer, supposed to entertain a passion for Miss Snevellicci, stuck his glass in his eye as though to hide a tear. Again and again Miss Snevellicci curtsied lower and lower, and again and again the applause came down louder and louder. At length, when the phenomenon picked up one of the smoking wreaths, and put it on, sideways, over Miss Snevellicci's eye, it reached its climax, and the play proceeded.

But, when Nicholas came on for his crack scene with Mrs. Crummles, what a clapping of hands there was! When Mrs. Crummles (who was his unworthy mother) sneered, and called him "presumptuous boy," and he defied her, what a tumult of applause came on! When he quarrelled with the other gentleman about the young lady, and, producing a case of pistols, said that, if he *was* a gentleman, he would fight him in that drawing-room, until the furniture was sprinkled with the blood of one, if not of two—how boxes, pit, and gallery joined in one most vigorous cheer! When he called his mother names, because she wouldn't give up the young lady's property, and she, relenting, caused him to relent likewise, and fall down on one knee and ask her blessing, how the ladies in the audience sobbed! When he was hid behind the curtain in the dark, and the wicked relation poked a sharp sword in every direction, save where his legs were plainly visible, what a thrill of anxious fear ran through the house! His air, his figure, his walk, his look, everything he said or did, was the subject of commendation. There was a round of applause every time he spoke. And when, at last, in the pump-and-tub scene, Mrs. Grudden lighted the blue fire, and all the unemployed members of the company came in, and tumbled down in various directions—not because that had anything to do with the plot, but in order to finish off with a tableau—the audience (who had by this time increased considerably) gave vent to such a shout of enthusiasm as had not been heard in those walls for many and many a day.

In short, the success both of new piece and new actor was complete, and, when Miss Snevellicci was called for at the end of the play, Nicholas led her on, and divided the applause.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCERNING A YOUNG LADY FROM LONDON, WHO JOINS THE COMPANY, AND AN ELDERLY ADMIRER WHO FOLLOWS IN HER TRAIN; WITH AN AFFECTING CEREMONY CONSEQUENT ON THEIR ARRIVAL.

THE new piece, being a decided hit, was announced for every evening of performance until further notice, and the evenings when the theatre was closed were reduced from three in the week to two. Nor were these the only tokens of extraordinary success; for, on the succeeding Saturday, Nicholas received, by favour of the indefatigable Mrs. Grudden, no less a sum than thirty shillings; besides which substantial reward, he enjoyed considerable fame and honour: having a presentation copy of Mr. Curdle's pamphlet forwarded to the theatre, with that gentleman's own autograph (in itself an inestimable treasure) on the fly-leaf, accompanied with a note, containing many expressions of approval, and an unsolicited assurance that Mr. Curdle would be very happy to read Shakspeare to him for three hours every morning before breakfast during his stay in the town.

"I've got another novelty, Johnson," said Mr. Crummles one morning in great glee.

"What's that?" rejoined Nicholas. "The pony?"

"No, no, we never come to the pony till everything else has failed," said Mr. Crummles. "I don't think we shall come to the pony at all this season. No, no, not the pony."

"A boy phenomenon, perhaps?" suggested Nicholas.

"There is only one phenomenon, sir," replied Mr. Crummles impressively, "and that's a girl."

"Very true," said Nicholas. "I beg your pardon. Then I don't know what it is, I am sure."

"What should you say to a young lady from London?" inquired Mr. Crummles. "Miss So-and-so, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane?"

"I should say she would look very well in the bills," said Nicholas.

"You're about right there," said Mr. Crummles; "and, if you had said she would look very well upon the stage too, you wouldn't have been far out. Look here; what do you think of this?"

With this inquiry Mr. Crummles unfolded a red poster, and a blue poster, and a yellow poster, at the top of each of which public notification was inscribed, in enormous characters—

"First appearance of the unrivalled Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane!"

"Dear me!" said Nicholas, "I know that lady."

"Then you are acquainted with as much talent as was ever compressed into one young person's body," retorted Mr. Crummles, rolling up the bills again; "that is, talent of a certain sort—of a certain sort. 'The Blood Drinker,'" added Mr. Crummles with a prophetic sigh, "'The Blood Drinker' will die with that girl; and she's the only sylph *I* ever saw who could stand upon one leg, and play the tambourine on her other knee, *like* a sylph."

"When does she come down?" asked Nicholas.

"We expect her to-day," replied Mr. Crummles. "She is an old friend of Mrs. Crummles's. Mrs. Crummles saw what she could do—always knew it from the first. She taught her, indeed, nearly all she knows. Mrs. Crummles was the original Blood Drinker."

"Was she, indeed?"

"Yes. She was obliged to give it up, though."

"Did it disagree with her?" asked Nicholas.

"Not so much with her as with her audiences," replied Mr. Crummles. "Nobody could stand it. It was too tremendous. You don't quite know what Mrs. Crummles is yet."

Nicholas ventured to insinuate that he thought he did.

"No, no, you don't," said Mr. Crummles; "you don't, indeed. *I* don't, and that's a fact. I don't think her country will till she is dead. Some new proof of talent bursts from that astonishing woman every year of her life. Look at her—mother of six children—three of 'em alive, and all upon the stage!"

"Extraordinary!" cried Nicholas.

"Ah! extraordinary indeed," rejoined Mr. Crummles, taking a complacent pinch of snuff, and shaking his head gravely. "I pledge you my professional word I didn't even know she could dance till her last benefit, and then she played Juliet, and Helen Macgregor, and did the Skipping-rope Hornpipe between the pieces. The very first time I saw that admirable woman, Johnson," said Mr. Crummles, drawing a little nearer, and speaking in the tone of confidential friendship, "she stood upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks."

"You astonish me!" said Nicholas.

"*She* astonished *me!*" returned Mr. Crummles with a very serious countenance. "Such grace, coupled with such dignity! I adored her from that moment!"

The arrival of the gifted subject of these remarks put an abrupt termination to Mr. Crummles's eulogium. Almost immediately afterwards, Master Percy Crummles entered with a letter, which had arrived by the General Post, and was directed to his gracious mother; at sight of the superscription whereof Mrs. Crummles exclaimed, "From Henrietta Petowker, I do declare!" and instantly became absorbed in the contents.

"Is it——?" inquired Mr. Crummles, hesitating.

"Oh yes, it's all right!" replied Mrs. Crummles, anticipating the question. "What an excellent thing for her, to be sure!"

"It's the best thing altogether that I ever heard of, I think," said Mr. Crummles; and then Mr. Crummles, Mrs. Crummles, and Master Percy Crummles all fell to laughing violently. Nicholas left them to enjoy their mirth together, and walked to his lodgings; wondering very much what mystery connected with Miss Petowker could provoke such merriment, and pondering still more on the extreme surprise with which that lady would regard his sudden enlistment in a profession of which she was such a distinguished and brilliant ornament.

But in this latter respect he was mistaken; for—whether Mr. Vincent Crummles had paved the way, or Miss Petowker had some special reason for treating him with even more than her usual amiability—their meeting at the theatre next day was more like that of two dear friends who had been inseparable from infancy, than a recognition passing between a lady and gentleman who had only met some half-dozen times, and then by mere chance. Nay, Miss Petowker even whispered that she had wholly dropped the Kenwigses in her conversations with the manager's family, and had represented herself as having encountered Mr. Johnson in the very first and most fashionable circles; and, on Nicholas receiving this intelligence with unfeigned surprise, she added, with a sweet glance, that she had a claim on his good-nature now, and might tax it before long.

Nicholas had the honour of playing in a slight piece with Miss Petowker that night, and could not but observe that the warmth of her reception was mainly attributable to a most persevering umbrella in the upper boxes. He saw, too, that the enchanting actress cast many sweet looks towards the quarter whence these sounds proceeded; and that, every time she did so, the umbrella broke out afresh. Once he thought that a peculiarly-shaped hat in the same corner was not wholly unknown to him;

but, being occupied with his share of the stage business, he bestowed no great attention upon this circumstance, and it had quite vanished from his memory by the time he reached home.

He had just sat down to supper with Smike, when one of the people of the house came outside the door, and announced that a gentleman below-stairs wished to speak to Mr. Johnson.

"Well, if he does, you must tell him to come up; that's all I know," replied Nicholas. "One of our hungry brethren, I suppose, Smike."

His fellow-lodger looked at the cold meat in silent calculation of the quantity that would be left for dinner next day, and put back a slice he had cut for himself, in order that the visitor's encroachments might be less formidable in their effects.

"It is not anybody who has been here before," said Nicholas, "for he is tumbling up every stair. Come in, come in. In the name of wonder! Mr. Lillyvick?"

It was, indeed, the collector of water-rates, who, regarding Nicholas with a fixed look and immovable countenance, shook hands with most portentous solemnity, and sat himself down in a seat by the chimney-corner.

"Why, when did you come here?" asked Nicholas.

"This morning, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick.

"Oh! I see; then you were at the theatre to-night, and it was your umb——"

"This umbrella," said Mr. Lillyvick, producing a fat green cotton one with a battered ferrule. "What did you think of that performance?"

"So far as I could judge, being on the stage," replied Nicholas, "I thought it very agreeable."

"Agreeable!" cried the collector. "I mean to say, sir, that it was delicious."

Mr. Lillyvick bent forward to pronounce the last word with greater emphasis; and, having done so, drew himself up, and frowned and nodded a great many times.

"I say, delicious," repeated Mr. Lillyvick. "Absorbing, fairy-like, toomultuous!" and again Mr. Lillyvick drew himself up, and again he frowned and nodded.

"Ah!" said Nicholas, a little surprised at these symptoms of ecstatic approbation. "Yes—she is a clever girl."

"She is a divinity," returned Mr. Lillyvick, giving a collector's double knock on the ground with the umbrella before mentioned. "I have known divine actresses before now, sir; I used to collect—at least, I used to *call* for—and very often call for—the water-rate at the house of a divine actress, who lived in my beat for upwards of four year, but never—no, never, sir—of all divine creatures, actresses or no actresses, did I see a diviner one than is Henrietta Petowker."

Nicholas had much ado to prevent himself from laughing; not trusting himself to speak, he merely nodded in accordance with Mr. Lillyvick's nods, and remained silent.

"Let me speak a word with you in private," said Mr. Lillyvick.

Nicholas looked good-humouredly at Smike, who, taking the hint, disappeared.

"A bachelor is a miserable wretch, sir," said Mr. Lillyvick.

"Is he?" asked Nicholas.

"He is," rejoined the collector. "I have lived in the world for nigh sixty year, and I ought to know what it is."

"You *ought* to know, certainly," thought Nicholas; "but whether you do, or not, is another question."

"If a bachelor happens to have saved a little matter of money," said Mr. Lillyvick, "his sisters and brothers, and nephews and nieces, look *to* that money, and not to him; even if, by being a public character, he is the head of the family, or, as it may be, the main from which all the other little branches are turned on, they still wish him dead all the while, and get low-spirited every time they see him looking in good health, because they want to come into his little property. You see that?"

"Oh yes!" replied Nicholas: "it's very true, no doubt."

"The great reason for not being married," resumed Mr. Lillyvick, "is the expense; that's what's kept me off, or else—Lord!" said Mr. Lillyvick, snapping his fingers, "I might have had fifty women."

"Fine women?" asked Nicholas.

"Fine women, sir!" replied the collector. "Ay! not so fine as Henrietta Petowker, for she is an uncommon specimen, but such women as don't fall into every man's way, I can tell you. Now, suppose a man can get a fortune *in* a wife instead of with her—eh?"

"Why, then, he's a lucky fellow," replied Nicholas.

"That's what I say," retorted the collector, patting him benignantly on the side of the head with his umbrella; "just what I say. Henrietta Petowker, the talented Henrietta Petowker, has a fortune in herself, and I'm going to——"

"To make her Mrs. Lillyvick?" suggested Nicholas.

"No, sir, not to make her Mrs. Lillyvick," replied the collector. "Actresses, sir, always keep their maiden names—that's the regular

thing—but I'm going to marry her; and the day after to-morrow, too."

"I congratulate you, sir," said Nicholas.

"Thank you, sir," replied the collector, buttoning his waistcoat. "I shall draw her salary, of course, and I hope, after all, that it's nearly as cheap to keep two as it is to keep one; that's a consolation."

"Surely you don't want any consolation at such a moment?" observed Nicholas.

"No," replied Mr. Lillyvick, shaking his head nervously: "no—of course not."

"But how come you both here, if you're going to be married, Mr. Lillyvick?" asked Nicholas.

"Why, that's what I came to explain to you," replied the collector of water-rate. "The fact is, we have thought it best to keep it secret from the family."

"Family!" said Nicholas. "What family?"

"The Kenwigses, of course," rejoined Mr. Lillyvick. "If my niece and the children had known a word about it before I came away, they'd have gone into fits at my feet, and never have come out of 'em till I took an oath not to marry anybody—or they'd have got out a commission of lunacy, or some dreadful thing," said the collector, quite trembling as he spoke.

"To be sure," said Nicholas. "Yes; they would have been jealous, no doubt."

"To prevent which," said Mr. Lillyvick, "Henrietta Petowker (it was settled between us) should come down here to her friends, the Crummleses, under pretence of this engagement, and I should go down to Guildford the day before, and join her on the coach there, which I did, and we came down from Guildford yesterday together. Now, for fear you should be writing to Mr. Noggs, and might say anything about us, we have thought it best to let you into the secret. We shall be married from the Crummleses' lodgings, and shall be delighted to see you—either before church or at breakfast-time, which you like. It won't be expensive, you know," said the collector, highly anxious to prevent any misunderstanding on this point; "just muffins and coffee, with perhaps a shrimp, or something of that sort, for a relish, you know."

"Yes, yes, I understand," replied Nicholas. "Oh! I shall be most happy to come; it will give me the greatest pleasure. Where's the lady stopping—with Mrs. Crummles?"

"Why, no," said the collector; "they couldn't very well dispose of her at night, and so she is staying with an acquaintance of hers, and another young lady; they both belong to the theatre."

"Miss Snevellicci, I suppose?" said Nicholas.

"Yes, that's the name."

"And they'll be bridesmaids, I presume?" said Nicholas.

"Why," said the collector with a rueful face, "they *will* have four bridesmaids; I'm afraid they'll make it rather theatrical."

"Oh no, not at all!" replied Nicholas, with an awkward attempt to convert a laugh into a cough. "Who may the four be? Miss Snevellicci, of course—Miss Ledrook——"

"The—the phenomenon," groaned the collector.

"Ha, ha!" cried Nicholas. "I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm laughing at—yes, that'll be very pretty—the phenomenon—who else?"

"Some young woman or other," replied the collector, rising; "some other friend of Henrietta Petowker's. Well, you'll be careful not to say anything about it, will you?"

"You may safely depend upon me," replied Nicholas. "Won't you take anything to eat or drink?"

"No," said the collector; "I haven't any appetite. I should think it was a very pleasant life, the married one—eh?"

"I have not the least doubt of it," rejoined Nicholas.

"Yes," said the collector; "certainly. Oh yes! No doubt. Good night."

With these words, Mr. Lillyvick, whose manner had exhibited, through the whole of this interview, a most extraordinary compound of precipitation, hesitation, confidence and doubt, fondness, misgiving, meanness, and self-importance, turned his back upon the room, and left Nicholas to enjoy a laugh by himself if he felt so disposed.

Without stopping to inquire whether the intervening day appeared to Nicholas to consist of the usual number of hours of the ordinary length, it may be remarked that, to the parties more directly interested in the forthcoming ceremony, it passed with great rapidity, insomuch that, when Miss Petowker awoke on the succeeding morning in the chamber of Miss Snevellicci, she declared that nothing should ever persuade her that that really was the day which was to behold a change in her condition.

"I never will believe it," said Miss Petowker; "I cannot really. It's of no use talking, I never can make up my mind to go through with such a trial!"

On hearing this, Miss Snevellicci and Miss Ledrook, who knew perfectly well that their fair friend's mind had been made up for three or four years, at any period of which time she would have cheerfully undergone the desperate

trial now approaching, if she could have found any eligible gentleman disposed for the venture, began to preach comfort and firmness, and to say how very proud she ought to feel that it was in her power to confer lasting bliss on a deserving object, and how necessary it was for the happiness of mankind in general that women should possess fortitude and resignation on such occasions; and that although, for their parts, they held true happiness to consist in a single life, which they would not willingly exchange—no, not for any worldly consideration—still (thank God), if ever the time *should* come, they hoped they knew their duty too well to repine, but would the rather submit with meekness and humility of spirit to a fate for which Providence had clearly designed them, with a view to the contentment and reward of their fellow-creatures.

"I might feel it was a great blow," said Miss Snevellicci, "to break up old associations and what-do-you-call-'ems of that kind, but I would submit, my dear, I would indeed."

"So would I," said Miss Ledrook; "I would rather court the yoke than shun it. I have broken hearts before now, and I'm very sorry for it: for it's a terrible thing to reflect upon."

"It is indeed," said Miss Snevellicci. "Now, Led, my dear, we must positively get her ready, or we shall be too late, we shall indeed."

This pious reasoning, and perhaps the fear of being too late, supported the bride through the ceremony of robing, after which strong tea and brandy were administered in alternate doses, as a means of strengthening her feeble limbs and causing her to walk steadier.

"How do you feel now, my love?" inquired Miss Snevellicci.

"Oh, Lillyvick!" cried the bride. "If you knew what I am undergoing for you!"

"Of course he knows it, love, and will never forget it," said Miss Ledrook.

"Do you think he won't?" cried Miss Petowker, really showing great capability for the stage. "Oh! do you think he won't? Do you think Lillyvick will always remember it—always, always, always?"

There is no knowing in what this burst of feeling might have ended, if Miss Snevellicci had not at that moment proclaimed the arrival of the fly, which so astounded the bride that she shook off divers alarming symptoms which were coming on very strong, and, running to the glass, adjusted her dress, and calmly declared that she was ready for the sacrifice.

She was accordingly supported into the coach, and there "kept up" (as Miss Snevellicci said) with perpetual sniffs of *sal volatile* and sips of brandy and other gentle stimulants, until they reached the manager's door, which was already opened by the two Master Crummleses, who wore white cockades, and were decorated with the choicest and most resplendent waistcoats in the theatrical wardrobe. By the combined exertions of these young gentlemen and the bridesmaids, assisted by the coachman, Miss Petowker was at length supported in a condition of much exhaustion to the first floor, where she no sooner encountered the youthful bridegroom than she fainted with great decorum.

"Henrietta Petowker!" said the collector; "cheer up, my lovely one."

Miss Petowker grasped the collector's hand, but emotion choked her utterance.

"Is the sight of me so dreadful, Henrietta Petowker?" said the collector.

"Oh no, no, no!" rejoined the bride; "but all the friends—the darling friends—of my youthful days—to leave them all—it is such a shock!"

With such expressions of sorrow, Miss Petowker went on to enumerate the dear friends of her youthful days one by one, and to call upon such of them as were present to come and embrace her. This done, she remembered that Mrs. Crummles had been more than a mother to her, and after that, that Mr. Crummles had been more than a father to her, and after that, that the Master Crummleses and Miss Ninetta Crummles had been more than brothers and sisters to her. These various remembrances, being each accompanied with a series of hugs, occupied a long time, and they were obliged to drive to church very fast, for fear they should be too late.

The procession consisted of two flies; in the first of which were Miss Bravassa (the fourth bridesmaid), Mrs. Crummles, the collector, and Mr. Folair, who had been chosen as his second on the occasion. In the other were the bride, Mr. Crummles, Miss Snevellicci, Miss Ledrook, and the phenomenon. The costumes were beautiful. The bridesmaids were quite covered with artificial flowers, and the phenomenon, in particular, was rendered almost invisible by the portable arbour in which she was enshrined. Miss Ledrook, who was of a romantic turn, wore in her breast the miniature of some field officer unknown, which she had purchased, a great bargain, not very long before; the other ladies displayed several dazzling articles of imitative jewellery, almost equal to real; and Mrs. Crummles came out in a stern and gloomy majesty, which attracted the admiration of all beholders.

But, perhaps the appearance of Mr. Crummles

was more striking and appropriate than that of any member of the party. This gentleman, who personated the bride's father, had, in pursuance of a happy and original conception, "made up" for the part by arraying himself in a theatrical wig, of a style and pattern commonly known as a brown George, and, moreover, assuming a snuff-coloured suit of the previous century, with grey silk stockings, and buckles to his shoes. The better to support his assumed character, he had determined to be greatly overcome, and, consequently, when they entered the church, the sobs of the affectionate parent were so heart-rending that the pew-opener suggested the propriety of his retiring to the vestry, and comforting himself with a glass of water before the ceremony began.

The procession up the aisle was beautiful. The bride, with the four bridesmaids, forming a group previously arranged and rehearsed; the collector, followed by his second, imitating his walk and gestures, to the indescribable amusement of some theatrical friends in the gallery; Mr. Crummles, with an infirm and feeble gait; Mrs. Crummles advancing with that stage walk which consists of a stride and a stop alternately —it was the completest thing ever witnessed. The ceremony was very quickly disposed of, and all parties present having signed the register (for which purpose, when it came to his turn, Mr. Crummles carefully wiped and put on an immense pair of spectacles), they went back to breakfast in high spirits. And here they found Nicholas awaiting their arrival.

"Now then!" said Crummles, who had been assisting Mrs. Grudden in the preparations, which were on a more extensive scale than was quite agreeable to the collector. "Breakfast, breakfast."

No second invitation was required. The company crowded and squeezed themselves at the table as well as they could, and fell to immediately: Miss Petowker blushing very much when anybody was looking, and eating very much when anybody was *not* looking; and Mr. Lillyvick going to work as though with the cool resolve that, since the good things must be paid for by him, he would leave as little as possible for the Crummleses to eat up afterwards.

"It's very soon done, sir, isn't it?" inquired Mr. Folair of the collector, leaning over the table to address him.

"What is soon done, sir?" returned Mr. Lillyvick.

"The tying up—the fixing one's self with a wife," replied Mr. Folair. "It don't take long, does it?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick, colouring. "It does not take long. And what then, sir?"

"Oh! nothing," said the actor. "It don't take a man long to hang himself, either, eh? Ha, ha!"

Mr. Lillyvick laid down his knife and fork, and looked round the table with indignant astonishment.

"To hang himself!" repeated Mr. Lillyvick.

A profound silence came upon all, for Mr. Lillyvick was dignified beyond expression.

"To hang himself!" cried Mr. Lillyvick again. "Is any parallel attempted to be drawn in this company between matrimony and hanging?"

"The noose, you know," said Mr. Folair, a little crest-fallen.

"The noose, sir!" retorted Mr. Lillyvick. "Does any man dare to speak to me of a noose, and Henrietta Pe——"

"Lillyvick," suggested Mr. Crummles.

"—And Henrietta Lillyvick in the same breath?" said the collector. "In this house, in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles, who have brought up a talented and virtuous family to be blessings and phenomenons, and what not, are we to hear talk of nooses?"

"Folair," said Mr. Crummles, deeming it a matter of decency to be affected by this allusion to himself and partner, "I'm astonished at you."

"What are you going on in this way at me for?" urged the unfortunate actor. "What have I done?"

"Done, sir!" cried Mr. Lillyvick. "Aimed a blow at the whole framework of society——"

"And the best and tenderest feelings," added Crummles, relapsing into the old man.

"—And the highest and most estimable of social ties," said the collector. "Noose! As if one was caught, trapped into the married state, pinned by the leg, instead of going into it of one's own accord, and glorying in the act?"

"I didn't mean to make it out that you were caught and trapped, and pinned by the leg," replied the actor. "I'm sorry for it; I can't say any more."

"So you ought to be, sir," returned Mr. Lillyvick; "and I am glad to hear that you have enough of feeling left to be so."

The quarrel appearing to terminate with this reply, Mrs. Lillyvick considered that the fittest occasion (the attention of the company being no longer distracted) to burst into tears, and require the assistance of all four bridesmaids,

which was immediately rendered, though not without some confusion, for the room being small, and the table-cloth long, a whole detachment of plates were swept off the board at the very first move. Regardless of this circumstance, however, Mrs. Lillyvick refused to be comforted until the belligerents had passed their words that the dispute should be carried no further, which, after a sufficient show of reluctance, they did, and from that time Mr. Folair sat in moody silence, contenting himself with pinching Nicholas's leg when anything was said, and so expressing his contempt both for the speaker and the sentiments to which he gave utterance.

There were a great number of speeches made; some by Nicholas, and some by Crummles, and some by the collector; two by the Master Crummleses in returning thanks for themselves, and one by the phenomenon on behalf of the bridesmaids, at which Mrs. Crummles shed tears. There was some singing, too, from Miss Ledrook and Miss Bravassa, and very likely there might have been more, if the fly-driver, who stopped to drive the happy pair to the spot where they proposed to take steamboat to Ryde, had not sent in a peremptory message intimating that, if they didn't come directly, he should infallibly demand eighteen-pence over and above his agreement.

This desperate threat effectually broke up the party. After a most pathetic leave-taking, Mr. Lillyvick and his bride departed for Ryde, where they were to spend the next two days in profound retirement, and whither they were accompanied by the infant, who had been appointed travelling bridesmaid on Mr. Lillyvick's express stipulation: as the steamboat people, deceived by her size, would (he had previously ascertained) transport her at half-price.

As there was no performance that night, Mr. Crummles declared his intention of keeping it up till everything to drink was disposed of; but Nicholas, having to play Romeo for the first time on the ensuing evening, contrived to slip away in the midst of a temporary confusion, occasioned by the unexpected development of strong symptoms of inebriety in the conduct of Mrs. Grudden.

To this act of desertion he was led, not only by his own inclinations, but by his anxiety on account of Smike, who, having to sustain the character of the Apothecary, had been as yet wholly unable to get any more of the part into his head than the general idea that he was very hungry, which—perhaps from old recollections—he had acquired with great aptitude.

"I don't know what's to be done, Smike," said Nicholas, laying down the book. "I am afraid you can't learn it, my poor fellow."

"I am afraid not," said Smike, shaking his head. "I think if you—— But that would give you so much trouble."

"What?" inquired Nicholas. "Never mind me."

"I think," said Smike, "if you were to keep saying it to me in little bits, over and over again, I should be able to recollect it from hearing you."

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Nicholas. "Well said! Let us see who tires first. Not I, Smike, trust me. Now then! 'Who calls so loud?'"

"'Who calls so loud?'" said Smike.

"'Who calls so loud?'" repeated Nicholas.

"'Who calls so loud?'" cried Smike.

Thus they continued to ask each other who called so loud over and over again; and, when Smike had that by heart, Nicholas went to another sentence, and then to two at a time, and then to three, and so on, until at midnight poor Smike found, to his unspeakable joy, that he really began to remember something about the text.

Early in the morning they went to it again, and Smike, rendered more confident by the progress he had already made, got on faster and with better heart. As soon as he began to acquire the words pretty freely, Nicholas showed him how he must come in with both hands spread out upon his stomach, and how he must occasionally rub it, in compliance with the established form by which people on the stage always denote that they want something to eat. After the morning's rehearsal they went to work again, nor did they stop, except for a hasty dinner, until it was time to repair to the theatre at night.

Never had master a more anxious, humble, docile pupil. Never had pupil a more patient, unwearying, considerate, kind-hearted master.

As soon as they were dressed, and at every interval when he was not upon the stage, Nicholas renewed his instructions. They prospered well. The Romeo was received with hearty plaudits and unbounded favour, and Smike was pronounced unanimously, alike by audience and actors, the very prince and prodigy of Apothecaries.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IS FRAUGHT WITH SOME DANGER TO MISS NICKLEBY'S PEACE OF MIND.

THE place was a handsome suite of private apartments in Regent Street; the time was three o'clock in the afternoon to the dull and plodding, and the first hour of morning to the gay and spirited; the persons were Lord Frederick Verisopht, and his friend Sir Mulberry Hawk.

These distinguished gentlemen were reclining listlessly on a couple of sofas, with a table between them, on which were scattered in rich confusion the materials of an untasted breakfast. Newspapers lay strewn about the room, but these, like the meal, were neglected and unnoticed; not, however, because any flow of conversation prevented the attractions of the journals from being called into request, for not a word was exchanged between the two, nor was any sound uttered, save when one, in tossing about to find an easier resting-place for his aching head, uttered an exclamation of impatience, and seemed for a moment to communicate a new restlessness to his companion.

These appearances would in themselves have furnished a pretty strong clue to the extent of the debauch of the previous night, even if there had not been other indications of the amusements in which it had been passed. A couple of billiard balls, all mud and dirt, two battered hats, a champagne bottle with a soiled glove twisted round the neck to allow of its being grasped more surely in its capacity of an offensive weapon; a broken cane; a card-case without the top; an empty purse; a watch-guard snapped asunder; a handful of silver, mingled with fragments of half-smoked cigars, and their stale and crumbled ashes;—these, and many other tokens of riot and disorder, hinted very intelligibly at the nature of last night's gentlemanly frolics.

Lord Frederick Verisopht was the first to speak. Dropping his slippered foot on the ground, and yawning heavily, he struggled into a sitting posture, and turned his dull languid eyes towards his friend, to whom he called in a drowsy voice.

"Hallo!" replied Sir Mulberry, turning round.

"Are we going to lie here all da-a-y?" said the lord.

"I don't know that we're fit for anything else," replied Sir Mulberry; "yet awhile, at least. I haven't a grain of life in me this morning."

"Life!" cried Lord Verisopht. "I feel as if there would be nothing so snug and comfortable as to die at once."

"Then why don't you die?" said Sir Mulberry.

With which inquiry he turned his face away, and seemed to occupy himself in an attempt to fall asleep.

His hopeful friend and pupil drew a chair to the breakfast-table, and essayed to eat; but, finding that impossible, lounged to the window, then loitered up and down the room with his hand to his fevered head, and finally threw himself again on his sofa, and roused his friend once more.

"What the devil's the matter?" groaned Sir Mulberry, sitting upright on the couch.

Although Sir Mulberry said this with sufficient ill-humour, he did not seem to feel himself quite at liberty to remain silent; for, after stretching himself very often, and declaring with a shiver that it was "infernal cold," he made an experiment at the breakfast table, and, proving more successful in it than his less-seasoned friend, remained there.

"Suppose," said Sir Mulberry, pausing with a morsel on the point of his fork, "suppose we go back to the subject of little Nickleby, eh?"

"Which little Nickleby; the money-lender or the ga-a-l?" asked Lord Verisopht.

"You take me, I see," replied Sir Mulberry. "The girl, of course."

"You promised me you'd find her out," said Lord Verisopht.

"So I did," rejoined his friend; "but I have thought further of the matter since then. You distrust me in the business—you shall find her out yourself."

"Na-ay," remonstrated Lord Verisopht.

"But I say yes," returned his friend. "You shall find her out yourself. Don't think that I mean when you can—I know as well as you that if I did, you could never get sight of her without me. No. I say you shall find her out—*shall*—and I'll put you in the way."

"Now, curse me if you ain't a real, deyvlish, downright, thorough-paced friend," said the young lord, on whom this speech had produced a most reviving effect.

"I'll tell you how," said Sir Mulberry. "She was at that dinner as a bait for you."

"No!" cried the young lord. "What the dey——"

"As a bait for you," repeated his friend; "old Nickleby told me so himself."

"What a fine old cock it is!" exclaimed Lord Verisopht; "a noble rascal!"

"Yes," said Sir Mulberry, "he knew she was a smart little creature——"

"Smart!" interposed the young lord. "Upon my soul, Hawk, she's a perfect beauty—a—a picture, a statue, a—a—upon my soul she is!"

"Well," replied Sir Mulberry, shrugging his shoulders and manifesting an indifference, whether he felt it or not; "that's a matter of taste; if mine doesn't agree with yours, so much the better."

"Confound it!" reasoned the lord, "you were thick enough with her that day, anyhow. I could hardly get in a word."

"Well enough for once, well enough for once," replied Sir Mulberry; "but not worth the trouble of being agreeable to again. If you seriously want to follow up the niece, tell the uncle that you must know where she lives and how she lives, and with whom, or you are no longer a customer of his. He'll tell you fast enough."

"Why didn't you say this before?" asked Lord Verisopht, "instead of letting me go on burning, consuming, dragging out a miserable existence for an a-age!"

"I didn't know it, in the first place," answered Sir Mulberry carelessly; "and, in the second, I didn't believe you were so very much in earnest."

Now, the truth was that, in the interval which had elapsed since the dinner at Ralph Nickleby's, Sir Mulberry Hawk had been furtively trying by every means in his power to discover whence Kate had so suddenly appeared, and whither she had disappeared. Unassisted by Ralph, however, with whom he had held no communication since their angry parting on that occasion, all his efforts were wholly unavailing, and he had therefore arrived at the determination of communicating to the young lord the substance of the admission he had gleaned from that worthy. To this he was impelled by various considerations; among which the certainty of knowing whatever the weak young man knew was decidedly not the least, as the desire of encountering the usurer's niece again, and using his utmost arts to reduce her pride, and revenge himself for her contempt, was uppermost in his thoughts. It was a politic course of proceeding, and one which could not fail to redound to his advantage in every point of view, since the very circumstance of his having extorted from Ralph Nickleby his real design in introducing his niece to such society, coupled with his extreme disinterestedness in communicating it so freely to his friend, could not but advance his interests in that quarter, and greatly facilitate the passage of coin (pretty frequent and speedy already) from the pockets of Lord Frederick Verisopht to those of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

Thus reasoned Sir Mulberry, and, in pursuance of this reasoning, he and his friend soon afterwards repaired to Ralph Nickleby's, there to execute a plan of operations concerted by Sir Mulberry himself, avowedly to promote his friend's object, and really to attain his own.

They found Ralph at home, and alone. As he led them into the drawing-room, the recollection of the scene which had taken place there seemed to occur to him, for he cast a curious look at Sir Mulberry, who bestowed upon it no other acknowledgment than a careless smile.

They had a short conference upon some money matters then in progress, which were scarcely disposed of when the lordly dupe (in pursuance of his friend's instructions) requested with some embarrassment to speak to Ralph alone.

"Alone, eh?" cried Sir Mulberry, affecting surprise. "Oh! very good. I'll walk into the next room here. Don't keep me long, that's all."

So saying, Sir Mulberry took up his hat, and, humming a fragment of a song, disappeared through the door of communication between the two drawing-rooms, and closed it after him.

"Now, my lord," said Ralph, "what is it?"

"Nickleby," said his client, throwing himself along the sofa on which he had been previously seated, so as to bring his lips nearer to the old man's ear, "what a pretty creature your niece is!"

"Is she, my lord?" replied Ralph. "Maybe—maybe—I don't trouble my head with such matters."

"You know she's a deyvlish fine girl," said the client. "You must know that, Nickleby. Come, don't deny that."

"Yes, I believe she is considered so," replied Ralph. "Indeed, I know she is. If I did not, you are an authority on such points, and your taste, my lord—on all points, indeed—is undeniable."

Nobody but the young man to whom these words were addressed could have been deaf to the sneering tone in which they were spoken, or blind to the look of contempt by which they were accompanied. But Lord Frederick Verisopht was both, and took them to be complimentary.

"Well," he said, "p'raps you're a little right, and p'raps you're a little wrong—a little of both, Nickleby. I want to know where this beauty lives, that I may have another peep at her, Nickleby."

"Really——" Ralph began in his usual tones.

"Don't talk so loud," cried the other, achieving the great point of his lesson to a miracle. "I don't want Hawk to hear."

"You know he is your rival, do you?" said Ralph, looking sharply at him.

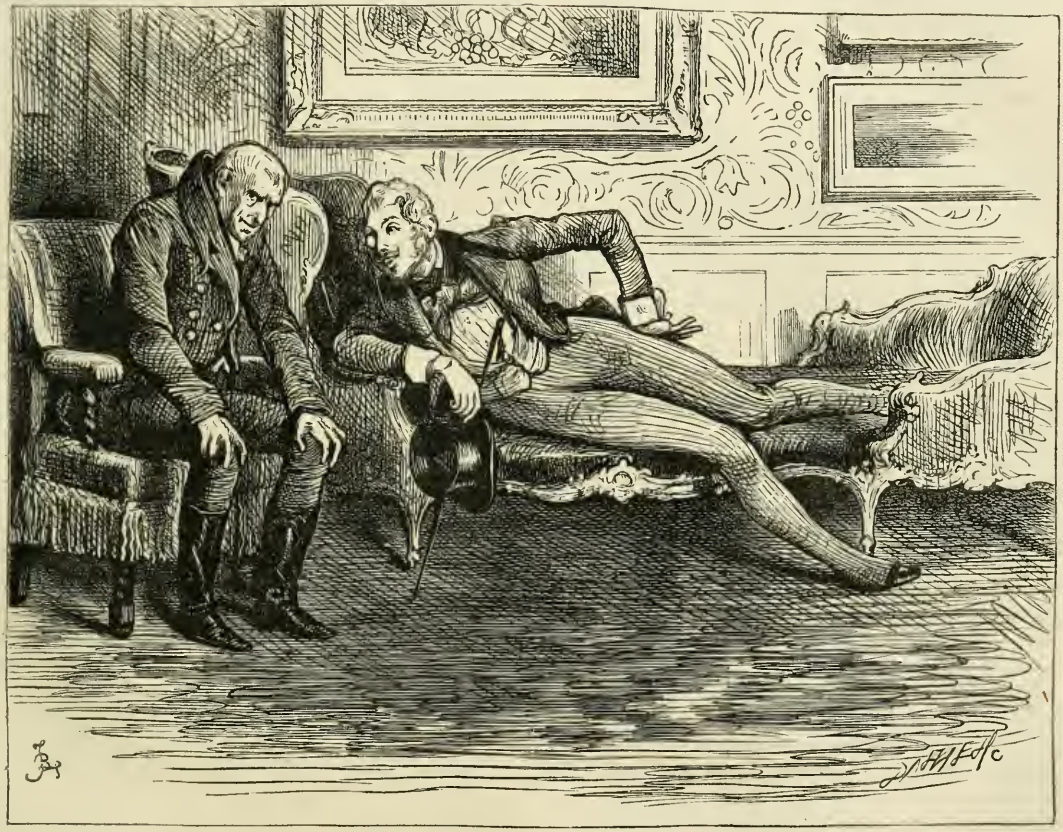
"He always is, d-a-amn him!" replied the client; "and I want to steal a march upon him. Ha, ha, ha! He'll cut up so rough, Nickleby, at our talking together without him. Where does she live, Nickleby, that's all? Only tell me where she lives, Nickleby."

"He bites," thought Ralph. "He bites."

"Eh, Nickleby, eh?" pursued the client. "Where does she live?"

"Really, my lord," said Ralph, rubbing his hands slowly over each other, "I must think before I tell you."

"No, not a bit of it, Nickleby; you mustn't think at all," replied Verisopht. "Where is it?"



"NICKLEBY," SAID HIS CLIENT, THROWING HIMSELF ALONG THE SOFA ON WHICH HE HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY SEATED, SO AS TO BRING HIS LIPS NEARER TO THE OLD MAN'S EAR, "WHAT A PRETTY CREATURE YOUR NIECE IS!"

"No good can come of your knowing," replied Ralph. "She has been virtuously and well brought up; to be sure she is handsome, poor, unprotected—poor girl, poor girl!"

Ralph ran over this brief summary of Kate's condition as if it were merely passing through his own mind, and he had no intention to speak aloud; but the shrewd sly look which he directed at his companion, as he delivered it, gave this poor assumption the lie.

"I tell you I only want to see her," cried his client. "A ma-an may look at a pretty woman without harm, mayn't he? Now, where *docs* she live? You know you're making a fortune out of me, Nickleby, and upon my soul nobody shall ever take me to anybody else, if you only tell me this."

"As you promise that, my lord," said Ralph with feigned reluctance, "and as I am most anxious to oblige you, and as there's no harm in

it—no harm—I'll tell you. But you had better keep it to yourself, my lord; strictly to yourself." Ralph pointed to the adjoining room as he spoke, and nodded expressively.

The young lord feigning to be equally impressed with the necessity of this precaution, Ralph disclosed the present address and occupation of his niece, observing that, from what he heard of the family, they appeared very ambitious to have distinguished acquaintances, and that a lord could, doubtless, introduce himself with great ease, if he felt disposed.

"Your object being only to see her again," said Ralph, "you could effect it at any time you chose by that means."

Lord Verisopht acknowledged the hint with a great many squeezes of Ralph's hard, horny hand, and, whispering that they would now do well to close the conversation, called to Sir Mulberry Hawk that he might come back.

"I thought you had gone to sleep," said Sir Mulberry, reappearing with an ill-tempered air.

"Sorry to detain you," replied the gull; "but Nickleby has been so ama-azingly funny that I couldn't tear myself away."

"No, no," said Ralph; "it was all his lordship. You know what a witty, humorous, elegant, accomplished man Lord Frederick is. Mind the step, my lord—Sir Mulberry, pray give way."

With such courtesies as these, and many low bows, and the same cold sneer upon his face all the while, Ralph busied himself in showing his visitors down-stairs, and otherwise than by the slightest possible motion about the corners of his mouth, returned no show of answer to the look of admiration with which Sir Mulberry Hawk seemed to compliment him on being such an accomplished and most consummate scoundrel.

There had been a ring at the bell a few minutes before, which was answered by Newman Noggs just as they reached the hall. In the ordinary course of business Newman would have either admitted the new-comer in silence, or have requested him or her to stand aside while the gentlemen passed out. But he no sooner saw who it was than, as if for some private reason of his own, he boldly departed from the established custom of Ralph's mansion in business hours, and, looking towards the respectable trio who were approaching, cried, in a loud and sonorous voice, "Mrs. Nickleby!"

"Mrs. Nickleby!" cried Sir Mulberry Hawk as his friend looked back, and stared him in the face.

It was, indeed, that well-intentioned lady, who, having received an offer for the empty house in the City directed to the landlord, had brought it post haste to Mr. Nickleby without delay.

"Nobody *you* know," said Ralph. "Step into the office, my—my—dear. I'll be with you directly."

"Nobody I know!" cried Sir Mulberry Hawk, advancing to the astonished lady. "Is this Mrs. Nickleby—the mother of Miss Nickleby—the delightful creature that I had the happiness of meeting in this house the very last time I dined here? But no;" said Sir Mulberry, stopping short. "No, it can't be. There is the same cast of features, the same indescribable air of—— But no; no. This lady is too young for that."

"I think you can tell the gentleman, brother-in-law, if it concerns him to know," said Mrs. Nickleby, acknowledging the compliment with a graceful bend, "that Kate Nickleby is my daughter."

"Her daughter, my lord!" cried Sir Mulberry, turning to his friend. "This lady's daughter, my lord."

"My lord!" thought Mrs. Nickleby. "Well, I never did——"

"This, then, my lord," said Sir Mulberry, "is the lady to whose obliging marriage we owe so much happiness. This lady is the mother of sweet Miss Nickleby. Do you observe the extraordinary likeness, my lord? Nickleby—introduce us."

Ralph did so in a kind of desperation.

"Upon my soul, it's a most delightful thing," said Lord Frederick, pressing forward. "How de do?"

Mrs. Nickleby was too much flurried by these uncommonly kind salutations, and her regrets at not having on her other bonnet, to make any immediate reply, so she merely continued to bend and smile, and betray great agitation.

"A-and how is Miss Nickleby?" said Lord Frederick. "Well, I hope?"

"She is quite well, I'm obliged to you, my lord," returned Mrs. Nickleby, recovering. "Quite well. She wasn't well for some days after that day she dined here, and I can't help thinking that she caught cold in that hackney coach coming home. Hackney coaches, my lord, are such nasty things, that it's almost better to walk at any time; for, although I believe a hackney coachman can be transported for life if he has a broken window, still they are so reckless, that they nearly all have broken windows. I once had a swelled face for six weeks, my lord, from riding in a hackney coach—I think it was a hackney coach," said Mrs. Nickleby, reflecting, "though I'm not quite certain

whether it wasn't a chariot; at all events, I know it was a dark green, with a very long number, beginning with a nought, and ending with a nine—no, beginning with a nine, and ending with a nought, that was it, and of course the Stamp-Office people would know at once whether it was a coach or a chariot, if any inquiries were made there—however that was, there it was with a broken window, and there was I for six weeks with a swelled face—I think that was the very same hackney coach that we found out afterwards had the top open all the time, and we should never even have known it, if they hadn't charged us a shilling an hour extra for having it open, which it seems is the law, or was then, and a most shameful law it appears to be—I don't understand the subject, but I should say the Corn Laws could be nothing to *that* Act of Parliament."

Having pretty well run herself out by this time, Mrs. Nickleby stopped as suddenly as she had started off, and repeated that Kate was quite well. "Indeed," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't think she ever was better since she had the hooping-cough, scarlet fever, and measles, all at the same time, and that's the fact."

"Is that letter for me?" growled Ralph, pointing to the little packet Mrs. Nickleby held in her hand.

"For you, brother-in-law," replied Mrs. Nickleby, "and I walked all the way up here on purpose to give it you."

"All the way up here!" cried Sir Mulberry, seizing upon the chance of discovering where Mrs. Nickleby had come from. "What a confounded distance! How far do you call it, now?"

"How far do I call it?" said Mrs. Nickleby. "Let me see. It's just a mile from our door to the Old Bailey."

"No, no. Not so much as that," urged Sir Mulberry.

"Oh! It is indeed," said Mrs. Nickleby. "I appeal to his lordship."

"I should decidedly say it was a mile," remarked Lord Frederick with a solemn aspect.

"It must be; it can't be a yard less," said Mrs. Nickleby. "All down Newgate Street, all down Cheapside, all up Lombard Street, down Gracechurch Street, and along Thames Street, as far as Spigwiffin's Wharf. Oh! It's a mile."

"Yes, on second thoughts, I should say it was," replied Sir Mulberry. "But you don't surely mean to walk all the way back?"

"Oh no!" rejoined Mrs. Nickleby. "I shall go back in an omnibus. I didn't travel about in omnibuses when my poor dear Nicholas was alive, brother-in-law. But as it is, you know——"

"Yes, yes," replied Ralph impatiently, "and you had better get back before dark."

"Thank you, brother-in-law, so I had," returned Mrs. Nickleby. "I think I had better say good-bye at once."

"Not stop, and—rest?" said Ralph, who seldom offered refreshments unless something was to be got by it.

"Oh dear me, no!" returned Mrs. Nickleby, glancing at the dial.

"Lord Frederick," said Sir Mulberry, "we are going Mrs. Nickleby's way. We'll see her safe to the omnibus?"

"By all means. Ye-es."

"Oh! I really couldn't think of it!" said Mrs. Nickleby.

But Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht were peremptory in their politeness, and leaving Ralph, who seemed to think, not unwisely, that he looked less ridiculous as a mere spectator than he would have done if he had taken any part in these proceedings, they quitted the house with Mrs. Nickleby between them; that good lady in a perfect ecstasy of satisfaction, no less with the attentions shown her by two titled gentlemen than with the conviction that Kate might now pick and choose, at least, between two large fortunes and most unexceptionable husbands.

As she was carried away for the moment by an irresistible train of thought, all connected with her daughter's future greatness, Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend exchanged glances over the top of the bonnet which the poor lady so much regretted not having left at home, and proceeded to dilate with great rapture, but much respect, on the manifold perfections of Miss Nickleby.

"What a delight, what a comfort, what a happiness, this amiable creature must be to you!" said Sir Mulberry, throwing into his voice an indication of the warmest feeling.

"She is, indeed, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby; "she is the sweetest-tempered, kindest-hearted creature—and so clever!"

"She looks clayver," said Lord Verisopht with the air of a judge of cleverness.

"I assure you she is, my lord," returned Mrs. Nickleby. "When she was at school in Devonshire, she was universally allowed to be beyond all exception the very cleverest girl there, and there were a great many very clever ones too, and that's the truth—twenty-five young ladies, fifty guineas a year without the et-ceteras, both the Miss Dowdles the most accomplished, elegant, fascinating creatures.—Oh dear me!" said Mrs. Nickleby, "I shall never forget what pleasure she used to give me and her poor

dear papa, when she was at that school, never —such a delightful letter every half-year, telling us that she was the first pupil in the whole establishment, and had made more progress than anybody else! I can scarcely bear to think of it even now. The girls wrote all the letters themselves," added Mrs. Nickleby, "and the writing-master touched them up afterwards with a magnifying glass and a silver pen; at least, I think they wrote them, though Kate was never quite certain about that, because she didn't know the handwriting of hers again; but, anyway, I know it was a circular which they all copied, and of course it was a very gratifying thing—very gratifying."

With similar recollections Mrs. Nickleby be-

"SIR MULBERRY HAWK AND HIS FRIEND EXCHANGED GLANCES OVER THE TOP OF THE BONNET."

guiled the tediousness of the way until they reached the omnibus, which the extreme politeness of her new friends would not allow them to leave until it actually started, when they took their hats, as Mrs. Nickleby solemnly assured her hearers on many subsequent occasions, "completely off," and kissed their straw-coloured kid gloves till they were no longer visible.

Mrs. Nickleby leant back in the furthest corner of the conveyance, and, closing her eyes, resigned herself to a host of most pleasing meditations. Kate had never said a word about having met either of these gentlemen: "that," she thought, "argues that she is strongly prepossessed in favour of one of them." Then the question arose, which one could it be? The

lord was the youngest, and his title was certainly the grandest; still, Kate was not the girl to be swayed by such considerations as these. "I will never put any constraint upon her inclinations," said Mrs. Nickleby to herself; "but, upon my word, I think there's no comparison between his lordship and Sir Mulberry—Sir Mulberry is such an attentive, gentlemanly creature, so much manner, such a fine man, and has so much to say for himself. I hope it's Sir Mulberry—I think it must be Sir Mulberry!" And then her thoughts flew back to her old predictions, and the number of times she had said that Kate with no fortune would marry better than other people's daughters with thousands; and as she pictured with the brightness of a mother's fancy all the beauty and grace of the poor girl who had struggled so cheerfully with her new life of hardship and trial, her heart grew too full, and the tears trickled down her face.

Meanwhile, Ralph walked to and fro in his little back-office, troubled in mind by what had just occurred. To say that Ralph loved or cared for—in the most ordinary acceptation of those terms—any one of God's creatures, would be the wildest fiction. Still, there had somehow stolen upon him, from time to time, a thought of his niece which was tinged with compassion and pity; breaking through the dull cloud of dislike or indifference which darkened men and women in his eyes, there was, in her case, the faintest gleam of light—a most feeble and sickly ray at the best of times—but there it was, and it showed the poor girl in a better and purer aspect than any in which he had looked on human nature yet.

"I wish," thought Ralph, "I had never done this. And yet it will keep this boy to me while there is money to be made. Selling a girl—throwing her in the way of temptation, and insult, and coarse speech. Nearly two thousand pounds profit from him already, though. Pshaw! match-making mothers do the same thing every day."

He sat down, and told the chances, for and against, on his fingers.

"If I had not put them in the right track today," thought Ralph, "this foolish woman would have done so. Well! If her daughter is as true to herself as she should be from what I have seen, what harm ensues? A little teasing, a little humbling, a few tears. Yes," said Ralph aloud, as he locked his iron safes, "she must take her chance. She must take her chance"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. NICKLEBY BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH MESSRS. PYKE AND PLUCK, WHOSE AFFECTION AND INTEREST ARE BEYOND ALL BOUNDS.

MRS. NICKLEBY had not felt so proud and important for many a day as when, on reaching home, she gave herself wholly up to the pleasant visions which had accompanied her on her way thither. Lady Mulberry Hawk—that was the prevalent idea. Lady Mulberry Hawk!—On Tuesday last, at St. George's, Hanover Square, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Llandaff, Sir Mulberry Hawk, of Mulberry Castle, North Wales, to Catherine, only daughter of the late Nicholas Nickleby, Esquire, of Devonshire. "Upon my word!" cried Mrs. Nicholas Nickleby, "it sounds very well."

Having dispatched the ceremony, with its attendant festivities, to the perfect satisfaction of her own mind, the sanguine mother pictured to her imagination a long train of honours and distinctions which could not fail to accompany Kate in her new and brilliant sphere. She would be presented at court, of course. On the anniversary of her birthday, which was upon the nineteenth of July ("at ten minutes past three o'clock in the morning," thought Mrs. Nickleby in a parenthesis, "for I recollect asking what o'clock it was"), Sir Mulberry would give a great feast to all his tenants, and would return them three and a half per cent. on the amount of their last half-year's rent, as would be fully described and recorded in the fashionable intelligence, to the immeasurable delight and admiration of all the readers thereof. Kate's picture, too, would be in at least half-a-dozen of the annuals, and on the opposite page would appear, in delicate type, "Lines on contemplating the Portrait of Lady Mulberry Hawk. By Sir Dingleby Dabber." Perhaps some one annual, of more comprehensive design than its fellows, might even contain a portrait of the mother of Lady Mulberry Hawk, with lines by the father of Sir Dingleby Dabber. More unlikely things had come to pass. Less interesting portraits had appeared. As this thought occurred to the good lady, her countenance unconsciously assumed that compound expression of simpering and sleepiness which, being common to all such portraits, is perhaps one reason why they are always so charming and agreeable.

With such triumphs of aërial architecture did Mrs. Nickleby occupy the whole evening after her accidental introduction to Ralph's titled

friends; and dreams, no less prophetic and equally promising, haunted her sleep that night. She was preparing for her frugal dinner next day, still occupied with the same ideas—a little softened down, perhaps, by sleep and daylight—when the girl who attended her, partly for company, and partly to assist in the household affairs, rushed into the room in unwonted agitation, and announced that two gentlemen were waiting in the passage for permission to walk up-stairs.

"Bless my heart!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, hastily arranging her cap and front, "if it should be—dear me, standing in the passage all this time—why don't you go and ask them to walk up, you stupid thing?"

While the girl was gone on this errand, Mrs. Nickleby hastily swept into a cupboard all vestiges of eating and drinking; which she had scarcely done, and seated herself with looks as collected as she could assume, when two gentlemen, both perfect strangers, presented themselves.

"How do you *do?*" said one gentleman, laying great stress on the last word of the inquiry.

"*How* do you do?" said the other gentleman, altering the emphasis, as if to give variety to the salutation.

Mrs. Nickleby curtsied and smiled, and curtsied again, and remarked, rubbing her hands as she did so, that she hadn't the—really—the honour to——

"To know us," said the first gentleman. "The loss has been ours, Mrs. Nickleby. Has the loss been ours, Pyke?"

"It has, Pluck," answered the other gentleman.

"We have regretted it very often, I believe, Pyke?" said the first gentleman.

"Very often, Pluck," answered the second.

"But now," said the first gentleman, "now we have the happiness we have pined and languished for. Have we pined and languished for this happiness, Pyke, or have we not?"

"You know we have, Pluck," said Pyke reproachfully.

"You hear him, ma'am?" said Mr. Pluck, looking round; "you hear the unimpeachable testimony of my friend Pyke—that reminds me—formalities, formalities, must not be neglected in civilised society. Pyke—Mrs. Nickleby."

Mr. Pyke laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed low.

"Whether I shall introduce myself with the same formality," said Mr. Pluck—"whether I shall say myself that my name is Pluck, or whether I shall ask my friend Pyke (who, being now regularly introduced, is competent to the office) to state for me, Mrs. Nickleby, that my name is Pluck; whether I shall claim your acquaintance on the plain ground of the strong interest I take in your welfare, or whether I shall make myself known to you as the friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk—these, Mrs. Nickleby, are considerations which I leave to you to determine."

"Any friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk's requires no better introduction to me," observed Mrs. Nickleby graciously.

"It is delightful to hear you say so," said Mr. Pluck, drawing a chair close to Mrs. Nickleby, and sitting himself down. "It is refreshing to know that you hold my excellent friend, Sir Mulberry, in such high esteem. A word in your ear, Mrs. Nickleby. When Sir Mulberry knows it, he will be a happy man—I say, Mrs. Nickleby, a happy man. Pyke, be seated."

"*My* good opinion," said Mrs. Nickleby,—and the poor lady exulted in the idea that she was marvellously sly,—"my good opinion can be of very little consequence to a gentleman like Sir Mulberry."

"Of little consequence!" exclaimed Mr. Pluck. "Pyke, of what consequence to our friend, Sir Mulberry, is the good opinion of Mrs. Nickleby?"

"Of what consequence?" echoed Pyke.

"Ay," repeated Pluck; "is it of the greatest consequence?"

"Of the very greatest consequence," replied Pyke.

"Mrs. Nickleby cannot be ignorant," said Mr. Pluck, "of the immense impression which that sweet girl has——"

"Pluck!" said his friend, "beware!"

"Pyke is right," muttered Mr. Pluck after a short pause; "I was not to mention it. Pyke is very right. Thank you, Pyke."

"Well now, really!" thought Mrs. Nickleby within herself. "Such delicacy as that I never saw!"

Mr. Pluck, after feigning to be in a condition of great embarrassment for some minutes, resumed the conversation by entreating Mrs. Nickleby to take no heed of what he had inadvertently said—to consider him imprudent, rash, injudicious. The only stipulation he would make in his own favour was, that she should give him credit for the best intentions.

"But when," said Mr. Pluck, "when I see so much sweetness and beauty on the one hand, and so much ardour and devotion on the other, I—— Pardon me, Pyke, I didn't intend to resume that theme. Change the subject, Pyke."

"We promised Sir Mulberry and Lord Frederick," said Pyke, "that we'd call this morning, and inquire whether you took any cold last night."

"Not the least in the world last night, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby, "with many thanks to his lordship and Sir Mulberry for doing me the honour to inquire; not the least—which is the more singular, as I really am very subject to colds, indeed—very subject. I had a cold once," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I think it was in the year eighteen hundred and seventeen; let me see, four and five are nine, and—yes, eighteen hundred and seventeen, that I thought I never should get rid of; actually and seriously, that I thought I never should get rid of. I was only cured at last by a remedy that I don't know whether you ever happened to hear of, Mr. Pluck. You have a gallon of water as hot as you can possibly bear it, with a pound of salt and sixpenn'orth of the finest bran, and sit with your head in it for twenty minutes every night just before going to bed; at least, I don't mean your head—your feet. It's a most extraordinary cure—a most extraordinary cure. I used it for the first time, I recollect, the day after Christmas-day, and by the middle of April following the cold was gone. It seems quite a miracle when you come to think of it, for I had it ever since the beginning of September."

"What an afflicting calamity!" said Mr. Pyke.

"Perfectly horrid!" exclaimed Mr. Pluck.

"But it's worth the pain of hearing, only to know that Mrs. Nickleby recovered it, isn't it, Pluck?" cried Mr. Pyke.

"That is the circumstance which gives it such a thrilling interest," replied Mr. Pluck.

"But come," said Pyke, as if suddenly recollecting himself; "we must not forget our mission in the pleasure of this interview. We come on a mission, Mrs. Nickleby."

"On a mission!" exclaimed that good lady, to whose mind a definite proposal of marriage for Kate at once presented itself in lively colours.

"From Sir Mulberry," replied Pyke. "You must be very dull here."

"Rather dull, I confess," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"We bring the compliments of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and a thousand entreaties that you'll take a seat in a private box at the play to-night," said Mr. Pluck.

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Nickleby, "I never go out at all, never."

"And that is the very reason, my dear Mrs. Nickleby, why you should go out to-night," retorted Mr. Pluck. "Pyke, entreat Mrs. Nickleby."

"Oh, pray do!" said Pyke.

"You positively must," urged Pluck.

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Nickleby, hesitating; "but——"

"There's not a but in the case, my dear Mrs. Nickleby," remonstrated Mr. Pluck; "not such a word in the vocabulary. Your brother-in-law joins us, Lord Frederick joins us, Sir Mulberry joins us, Pyke joins us—a refusal is out of the question. Sir Mulberry sends a carriage for you—twenty minutes before seven to the moment—you'll not be so cruel as to disappoint the whole party, Mrs. Nickleby?"

"You are so very pressing, that I scarcely know what to say," replied the worthy lady.

"Say nothing; not a word, not a word, my dearest madam," urged Mr. Pluck. "Mrs. Nickleby," said that excellent gentleman, lowering his voice, "there is the most trifling, the most excusable breach of confidence in what I am about to say; and yet if my friend Pyke there overheard it—such is that man's delicate sense of honour, Mrs. Nickleby—he'd have me out before dinner-time."

Mrs. Nickleby cast an apprehensive glance at the warlike Pyke, who had walked to the window; and Mr. Pluck, squeezing her hand, went on—

"Your daughter has made a conquest—a conquest on which I may congratulate you. Sir Mulberry, my dear ma'am, Sir Mulberry is her devoted slave. Hem!"

"Hah!" cried Mr. Pyke at this juncture, snatching something from the chimney-piece with a theatrical air. "What is this? what do I behold?"

"What *do* you behold, my dear fellow?" asked Mr. Pluck.

"It is the face, the countenance, the expression," cried Mr. Pyke, falling into his chair with a miniature in his hand; "feebly portrayed, imperfectly caught, but still *the* face, *the* countenance, *the* expression."

"I recognise it at this distance!" exclaimed Mr. Pluck in a fit of enthusiasm. "Is it not, my dear madam, the faint similitude of——"

"It is my daughter's portrait," said Mrs. Nickleby with great pride. And so it was. And little Miss La Creevy had brought it home for inspection only two nights before.

Mr. Pyke no sooner ascertained that he was quite right in his conjecture than he launched into the most extravagant encomiums of the divine original; and, in the warmth of his enthusiasm, kissed the picture a thousand times, while Mr. Pluck pressed Mrs. Nickleby's hand to his heart, and congratulated her on the possession of such a daughter, with so much

earnestness and affection, that the tears stood, or seemed to stand, in his eyes. Poor Mrs. Nickleby, who had listened in a state of enviable complacency at first, became at length quite overpowered by these tokens of regard for, and attachment to, the family; and even the servant-girl, who had peeped in at the door, remained rooted to the spot in astonishment at the ecstasies of the two friendly visitors.

By degrees these raptures subsided, and Mrs. Nickleby went on to entertain her guests with a lament over her fallen fortunes, and a picturesque account of her old house in the country: comprising a full description of the different apartments, not forgetting the little store-room, and a lively recollection of how many steps you went down to get into the garden, and which way you turned when you came out at the parlour door, and what capital fixtures there were in the kitchen. This last reflection naturally conducted her into the wash-house, where she stumbled upon the brewing utensils, among which she might have wandered for an hour, if the mere mention of those implements had not, by an association of ideas, instantly reminded Mr. Pyke that he was "amazing thirsty."

"And I'll tell you what," said Mr. Pyke; "if you'll send round to the public-house for a pot of mild half-and-half, positively and actually I'll drink it."

And positively and actually Mr. Pyke *did* drink it, and Mr. Pluck helped him, while Mrs. Nickleby looked on in divided admiration of the condescension of the two, and the aptitude with which they accommodated themselves to the pewter pot; in explanation of which seeming marvel it may be here observed, that gentlemen who, like Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, live upon their wits (or not so much, perhaps, upon the presence of their own wits as upon the absence of wits in other people) are occasionally reduced to very narrow shifts and straits, and are at such periods accustomed to regale themselves in a very simple and primitive manner.

"At twenty minutes before seven, then," said Mr. Pyke, rising, "the coach will be here. One more look—one little look—at that sweet face. Ah! here it is. Unmoved, unchanged!" This, by the way, was a very remarkable circumstance, miniatures being liable to so many changes of expression. "Oh, Pluck! Pluck!"

Mr. Pluck made no other reply than kissing Mrs. Nickleby's hand with a great show of feeling and attachment; Mr. Pyke having done the same, both gentlemen hastily withdrew.

Mrs. Nickleby was commonly in the habit of giving herself credit for a pretty tolerable share of penetration and acuteness, but she had never felt so satisfied with her own sharp-sightedness as she did that day. She had found it all out the night before. She had never seen Sir Mulberry and Kate together—never even heard Sir Mulberry's name—and yet hadn't she said to herself, from the very first, that she saw how the case stood? and what a triumph it was, for there was now no doubt about it. If these flattering attentions to herself were not sufficient proofs, Sir Mulberry's confidential friend had suffered the secret to escape him in so many words. "I am quite in love with that dear Mr. Pluck, I declare I am," said Mrs. Nickleby.

There was one great source of uneasiness in the midst of this good fortune, and that was the having nobody by to whom she could confide it. Once or twice she almost resolved to walk straight to Miss La Creevy's, and tell it all to her. "But I don't know," thought Mrs. Nickleby; "she is a very worthy person, but I am afraid too much beneath Sir Mulberry's station for us to make a companion of. Poor thing!" Acting upon this grave consideration, she rejected the idea of taking the little portrait painter into her confidence, and contented herself with holding out sundry vague and mysterious hopes of preferment to the servant-girl, who received these obscure hints of dawning greatness with much veneration and respect.

Punctual to its time came the promised vehicle, which was no hackney coach, but a private chariot, having behind it a footman, whose legs, although somewhat large for his body, might, as mere abstract legs, have set themselves up for models at the Royal Academy. It was quite exhilarating to hear the clash and bustle with which he banged the door and jumped up behind after Mrs. Nickleby was in; and, as that good lady was perfectly unconscious that he applied the gold-headed end of his long stick to his nose, and so telegraphed most disrespectfully to the coachman over her very head, she sat in a state of much stiffness and dignity, not a little proud of her position.

At the theatre entrance there was more banging and more bustle, and there were also Messrs. Pyke and Pluck waiting to escort her to her box; and so polite were they, that Mr. Pyke threatened with many oaths to "smifligate" a very old man with a lantern who accidentally stumbled in her way—to the great terror of Mrs. Nickleby, who, conjecturing more from Mr. Pyke's excitement than any previous acquaintance with the etymology of the word that smifligation and bloodshed must be in the main one and the same thing, was alarmed beyond

expression lest something should occur. Fortunately, however, Mr. Pyke confined himself to mere verbal smifligation, and they reached their box with no more serious interruption by the way than a desire on the part of the same pugnacious gentleman to "smash" the assistant box-keeper for happening to mistake the number.

Mrs. Nickleby had scarcely been put away behind the curtain of the box in an arm-chair, when Sir Mulberry and Lord Verisopht arrived, arrayed from the crowns of their heads to the tips of their gloves, and from the tips of their gloves to the toes of their boots, in the most elegant and costly manner. Sir Mulberry was a little hoarser than on the previous day, and Lord Verisopht looked rather sleepy and queer; from which tokens, as well as from the circumstance of their both being to a trifling extent unsteady upon their legs, Mrs. Nickleby justly concluded that they had taken dinner.

"We have been—we have been—toasting your lovely daughter, Mrs. Nickleby," whispered Sir Mulberry, sitting down behind her.

"Oh ho!" thought that knowing lady; "wine in, truth out.—You are very kind, Sir Mulberry."

"No, no, upon my soul!" replied Sir Mulberry Hawk. "It's you that's kind, upon my soul it is. It was so kind of you to come to-night."

"So very kind of you to invite me, you mean, Sir Mulberry," replied Mrs. Nickleby, tossing her head, and looking prodigiously sly.

"I am so anxious to know you, so anxious to cultivate your good opinion, so desirous that there should be a delicious kind of harmonious family understanding between us," said Sir Mulberry, "that you mustn't think I'm disinterested in what I do. I'm infernal selfish; I am—upon my soul I am."

"I am sure you can't be selfish, Sir Mulberry," replied Mrs. Nickleby. "You have much too open and generous a countenance for that."

"What an extraordinary observer you are!" said Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"Oh no, indeed, I don't see very far into things, Sir Mulberry!" replied Mrs. Nickleby in a tone of voice which left the baronet to infer that she saw very far indeed.

"I am quite afraid of you," said the baronet. "Upon my soul," repeated Sir Mulberry, looking round to his companions, "I am afraid of Mrs. Nickleby. She is so immensely sharp."

Messrs. Pyke and Pluck shook their heads mysteriously, and observed together that they had found that out long ago; upon which Mrs. Nickleby tittered, and Sir Mulberry laughed, and Pyke and Pluck roared.

"But where's my brother-in-law, Sir Mulberry?" inquired Mrs. Nickleby. "I shouldn't be here without him. I hope he's coming."

"Pyke," said Sir Mulberry, taking out his toothpick and lolling back in his chair, as if he were too lazy to invent a reply to this question, "where's Ralph Nickleby?"

"Pluck," said Pyke, imitating the baronet's action, and turning the lie over to his friend, "where's Ralph Nickleby?"

Mr. Pluck was about to return some evasive reply, when the bustle caused by a party entering the next box seemed to attract the attention of all four gentlemen, who exchanged glances of much meaning. The new party beginning to converse together, Sir Mulberry suddenly assumed the character of a most attentive listener, and implored his friends not to breathe—not to breathe.

"Why not?" said Mrs. Nickleby. "What is the matter?"

"Hush!" replied Sir Mulberry, laying his hand on her arm. "Lord Frederick, do you recognise the tones of that voice?"

"Deyvle take me if I didn't think it was the voice of Miss Nickleby."

"Lor, my lord!" cried Miss Nickleby's mamma, thrusting her head round the curtain. "Why, actually—Kate, my dear Kate!"

"*You* here, mamma! Is it possible?"

"Possible, my dear! Yes."

"Why, who—who on earth is that you have with you, mamma?" said Kate, shrinking back as she caught sight of a man smiling and kissing his hand.

"Who do you suppose, my dear?" replied Mrs. Nickleby, bending towards Mrs. Wititterly, and speaking a little louder for that lady's edification. "There's Mr. Pyke, Mr. Pluck, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Lord Frederick Verisopht."

"Gracious Heaven!" thought Kate hurriedly. "How comes she in such society?"

Now, Kate thought thus *so* hurriedly, and the surprise was so great, and, moreover, brought back so forcibly the recollection of what had passed at Ralph's delectable dinner, that she turned extremely pale, and appeared greatly agitated, which symptoms, being observed by Mrs. Nickleby, were at once set down by that acute lady as being caused and occasioned by violent love. But, although she was in no small degree delighted by this discovery, which reflected so much credit on her own quickness of perception, it did not lessen her motherly anxiety in Kate's behalf; and accordingly, with

a vast quantity of trepidation, she quitted her own box to hasten into that of Mrs. Wititterly. Mrs. Wititterly, keenly alive to the glory of having a lord and a baronet among her visiting acquaintance, lost no time in signing to Mr. Wititterly to open the door, and thus it was that in less than thirty seconds Mrs. Nickleby's party had made an irruption into Mrs. Wititterly's box, which it filled to the very door, there being, in fact, only room for Messrs. Pyke and Pluck to get in their heads and waistcoats.

"My dear Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby, kissing her daughter affectionately. "How ill you looked a moment ago! You quite frightened me, I declare!"

"It was mere fancy, mamma—the—the—reflection of the lights, perhaps," replied Kate, glancing nervously round, and finding it impossible to whisper any caution or explanation.

"Don't you see Sir Mulberry Hawk, my dear?"

Kate bowed slightly, and, biting her lip, turned her head towards the stage.

But Sir Mulberry Hawk was not to be so easily repulsed, for he advanced with extended hand; and Mrs. Nickleby officiously informing Kate of this circumstance, she was obliged to extend her own. Sir Mulberry retained it while he murmured a profusion of compliments, which Kate, remembering what had passed between them, rightly considered as so many aggravations of the insult he had already put upon her. Then followed the recognition of Lord Verisopht, and then the greeting of Mr. Pyke, and then that of Mr. Pluck, and finally, to complete the young lady's mortification, she was compelled, at Mrs. Wititterly's request, to perform the ceremony of introducing the odious persons, whom she regarded with the utmost indignation and abhorrence.

"Mrs. Wititterly is delighted," said Mr. Wititterly, rubbing his hands; "delighted, my lord, I am sure, with this opportunity of contracting an acquaintance which I trust, my lord, we shall improve. Julia, my dear, you must not allow yourself to be too much excited, you must not. Indeed you must not. Mrs. Wititterly is of a most excitable nature, Sir Mulberry. The snuff of a candle, the wick of a lamp, the bloom on a peach, the down on a butterfly. You might blow her away, my lord; you might blow her away."

Sir Mulberry seemed to think that it would be a great convenience if the lady could be blown away. He said, however, that the delight was mutual, and Lord Verisopht added that it was mutual, whereupon Messrs. Pyke and Pluck were heard to murmur from the distance that it was very mutual indeed.

"I take an interest, my lord," said Mrs. Wititterly with a faint smile, "such an interest in the drama."

"Ye-es. It's very interasting," replied Lord Verisopht.

"I'm always ill after Shakspeare," said Mrs. Wititterly. "I scarcely exist the next day; I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakspeare is such a delicious creature."

"Ye-es!" replied Lord Verisopht. "He was a clayver man."

"Do you know, my lord," said Mrs. Wititterly after a long silence, "I find I take so much more interest in his plays, after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in! Were you ever there, my lord?"

"No, nayver," replied Verisopht.

"Then really you ought to go, my lord," returned Mrs. Wititterly in very languid and drawling accents. "I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other, you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within one."

"Ye-es!" replied Lord Verisopht, "I shall certainly go there."

"Julia, my life," interposed Mr. Wititterly, "you are deceiving his lordship—unintentionally, my lord, she is deceiving you. It is your poetical temperament, my dear—your ethereal soul—your fervid imagination, which throws you into a glow of genius and excitement. There is nothing in the place, my dear—nothing, nothing."

"I think there must be something in the place," said Mrs. Nickleby, who had been listening in silence; "for, soon after I was married, I went to Stratford with my poor dear Mr. Nickleby, in a post-chaise from Birmingham—was it a post-chaise, though?" said Mrs. Nickleby, considering; "yes, it must have been a post-chaise, because I recollect remarking at the time that the driver had a green shade over his left eye;—in a post-chaise from Birmingham, and, after we had seen Shakspeare's tomb and birthplace, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in plaster-of-Paris, with a lay-down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking; and when I woke in the morning, and described him to Mr. Nickleby, he said it was Shakspeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed. Stratford—Stratford," continued Mrs. Nickleby, considering. "Yes, I am positive

about that, because I recollect I was in the family way with my son Nicholas at the time, and I had been very much frightened by an Italian image boy that very morning. In fact, it was quite a mercy, ma'am," added Mrs. Nickleby in a whisper to Mrs. Wititterly, "that my son didn't turn out to be a Shakspeare, and what a dreadful thing that would have been!"

When Mrs. Nickleby had brought this interesting anecdote to a close, Pyke and Pluck, ever zealous in their patron's cause, proposed the adjournment of a detachment of the party into the next box; and with so much skill were the preliminaries adjusted, that Kate, despite all she could say or do to the contrary, had no alternative but to suffer herself to be led away by Sir Mulberry Hawk. Her mother and Mr. Pluck accompanied them, but the worthy lady, pluming herself upon her discretion, took particular care not so much as to look at her daughter during the whole evening, and to seem wholly absorbed in the jokes and conversation of Mr. Pluck, who, having been appointed sentry over Mrs. Nickleby for that especial purpose, neglected, on his side, no possible opportunity of engrossing her attention.

Lord Frederick Verisopht remained in the next box to be talked to by Mrs. Wititterly, and Mr. Pyke was in attendance to throw in a word or two when necessary. As to Mr. Wititterly, he was sufficiently busy in the body of the house, informing such of his friends and acquaintance as happened to be there that those two gentlemen up-stairs, whom they had seen in conversation with Mrs. W., were the distinguished Lord Frederick Verisopht and his most intimate friend, the gay Sir Mulberry Hawk—a communication which inflamed several respectable housekeepers with the utmost jealousy and rage, and reduced sixteen unmarried daughters to the very brink of despair.

The evening came to an end at last, but Kate had yet to be handed down-stairs by the detested Sir Mulberry; and so skilfully were the manœuvres of Messrs. Pyke and Pluck conducted, that she and the baronet were the last of the party, and were even—without an appearance of effort or design—left at some little distance behind.

"Don't hurry, don't hurry," said Sir Mulberry as Kate hastened on, and attempted to release her arm.

She made no reply, but still pressed forward.

"Nay, then——" coolly observed Sir Mulberry, stopping her outright.

"You had best not seek to detain me, sir," said Kate angrily.

"And why not?" retorted Sir Mulberry. "My dear creature, now why do you keep up this show of displeasure?"

"*Show!*" repeated Kate indignantly. "How dare you presume to speak to me, sir—to address me—to come into my presence?"

"You look prettier in a passion, Miss Nickleby," said Sir Mulberry Hawk, stooping down, the better to see her face.

"I hold you in the bitterest detestation and contempt, sir," said Kate. "If you find any attraction in looks of disgust and aversion, you—— Let me rejoin my friends, sir, instantly. Whatever considerations may have withheld me thus far, I will disregard them all, and take a course that even *you* might feel, if you do not immediately suffer me to proceed."

Sir Mulberry smiled, and, still looking in her face and retaining her arm, walked towards the door.

"If no regard for my sex or helpless situation will induce you to desist from this coarse and unmanly persecution," said Kate, scarcely knowing, in the tumult of her passions, what she said,—"I have a brother who will resent it dearly one day."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Sir Mulberry, as though quietly communing with himself; passing his arm round her waist as he spoke, "she looks more beautiful, and I like her better in this mood, than when her eyes are cast down, and she is in perfect repose!"

How Kate reached the lobby where her friends were waiting she never knew, but she hurried across it without at all regarding them, and disengaged herself suddenly from her companion, sprang into the coach, and, throwing herself into its darkest corner, burst into tears.

Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, knowing their cue, at once threw the party into great commotion by shouting for the carriages, and getting up a violent quarrel with sundry inoffensive bystanders; in the midst of which tumult they put the affrighted Mrs. Nickleby in her chariot, and, having got her safely off, turned their thoughts to Mrs. Wititterly, whose attention also they had now effectually distracted from the young lady, by throwing her into a state of the utmost bewilderment and consternation. At length, the conveyance in which she had come rolled off too with its load, and the four worthies, being left alone under the portico, enjoyed a hearty laugh together.

"There!" said Sir Mulberry, turning to his noble friend. "Didn't I tell you last night that if we could find where they were going by bribing a servant through my fellow, and then

established ourselves close by with the mother, these people's honour would be our own? Why, here it is, done in four-and-twenty hours."

"Ye-es," replied the dupe. "But I have been tied to the old woman all ni-ight."

"Hear him!" said Sir Mulberry, turning to his two friends. "Hear this discontented grumbler! Isn't it enough to make a man swear never to help him in his plots and schemes again? Isn't it an infernal shame?"

Pyke asked Pluck whether it was not an infernal shame, and Pluck asked Pyke; but neither answered.

"Isn't it the truth?" demanded Verisopht. "Wasn't it so?"

"Wasn't it so!" repeated Sir Mulberry. "How would you have had it? How could we have got a general invitation at first sight—come when you like, go when you like, stop as long as you like, do what you like—if you, the lord, had not made yourself agreeable to the foolish mistress of the house? Do *I* care for this girl, except as your friend? Haven't I been sounding your praises in her ears, and bearing her pretty sulks and peevishness all night for you? What sort of stuff do you think I'm made of? Would I do this for every man? Don't I deserve even gratitude in return?"

"You're a deyvlish good fellow," said the poor young lord, taking his friend's arm. "Upon my life, you're a deyvlish good fellow, Hawk."

"And I have done right, have I?" demanded Sir Mulberry.

"Quite ri-ight."

"And like a poor, silly, good-natured, friendly dog as I am, eh?"

"Ye-es, ye-es—like a friend," replied the other.

"Well, then," replied Sir Mulberry, "I'm satisfied. And now let's go and have our revenge on the German baron and the Frenchman, who cleaned you out so handsomely last night."

With these words the friendly creature took his companion's arm, and led him away, turning half round as he did so, and bestowing a wink and a contemptuous smile on Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, who, cramming their handkerchiefs into their mouths to denote their silent enjoyment of the whole proceedings, followed their patron and his victim at a little distance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS NICKLEBY, RENDERED DESPERATE BY THE PERSECUTION OF SIR MULBERRY HAWK, AND THE COMPLICATED DIFFICULTIES AND DISTRESSES WHICH SURROUND HER, APPEALS, AS A LAST RESOURCE, TO HER UNCLE FOR PROTECTION.

THE ensuing morning brought reflection with it, as morning usually does; but widely different was the train of thought it awakened in the different persons who had been so unexpectedly brought together on the preceding evening by the active agency of Messrs. Pyke and Pluck.

The reflections of Sir Mulberry Hawk—if such a term can be applied to the thoughts of the systematic and calculating man of dissipation, whose joys, regrets, pains, and pleasures are all of self, and who would seem to retain nothing of the intellectual faculty but the power to debase himself, and to degrade the very nature whose outward semblance he wears—the reflections of Sir Mulberry Hawk turned upon Kate Nickleby, and were, in brief, that she was undoubtedly handsome; that her coyness *must* be easily conquerable by a man of his address and experience, and that the pursuit was one which could not fail to redound to his credit, and greatly to enhance his reputation with the world. And lest this last consideration—no mean or secondary one with Sir Mulberry—should sound strangely in the ears of some, let it be remembered that most men live in a world of their own, and that in that limited circle alone are they ambitious for distinction and applause. Sir Mulberry's world was peopled with profligates, and he acted accordingly.

Thus, cases of injustice, and oppression, and tyranny, and the most extravagant bigotry, are in constant occurrence among us every day. It is the custom to trumpet forth much wonder and astonishment at the chief actors therein setting at defiance so completely the opinion of the world; but there is no greater fallacy; it is precisely because they do consult the opinion of their own little world that such things take place at all, and strike the great world dumb with amazement.

The reflections of Mrs. Nickleby were of the proudest and most complacent kind; and, under the influence of her very agreeable delusion, she straightway sat down and indited a long letter to Kate, in which she expressed her entire approval of the admirable choice she had made, and extolled Sir Mulberry to the skies; asserting, for the more complete satisfaction of her

daughter's feelings, that he was precisely the individual whom she (Mrs. Nickleby) would have chosen for her son-in-law, if she had had the picking and choosing from all mankind. The good lady then, with the preliminary observation that she might be fairly supposed not to have lived in the world so long without knowing its ways, communicated a great many subtle precepts applicable to the state of courtship, and confirmed in their wisdom by her own personal experience. Above all things, she commended a strict maidenly reserve, as being not only a very laudable thing in itself, but as tending materially to strengthen and increase a lover's ardour. "And I never," added Mrs. Nickleby, "was more delighted in my life than to observe last night, my dear, that your good sense had already told you this." With which sentiment, and various hints of the pleasure she derived from the knowledge that her daughter inherited so large an instalment of her own excellent sense and discretion (to nearly the full measure of which she might hope, with care, to succeed in time), Mrs. Nickleby concluded a very long and rather illegible letter.

Poor Kate was well-nigh distracted on the receipt of four closely-written and closely-crossed sides of congratulation on the very subject which had prevented her closing her eyes all night, and kept her weeping and watching in her chamber; still worse and more trying was the necessity of rendering herself agreeable to Mrs. Wititterly, who, being in low spirits after the fatigue of the preceding night, of course expected her companion (else wherefore had she board and salary?) to be in the best spirits possible. As to Mr. Wititterly, he went about all day in a tremor of delight at having shaken hands with a lord, and having actually asked him to come and see him in his own house. The lord himself, not being troubled to any inconvenient extent with the power of thinking, regaled himself with the conversation of Messrs. Pyke and Pluck, who sharpened their wit by a plentiful indulgence in various costly stimulants at his expense.

It was four in the afternoon—that is, the vulgar afternoon of the sun and the clock—and Mrs. Wititterly reclined, according to custom, on the drawing-room sofa, while Kate read aloud a new novel in three volumes, entitled "The Lady Flabella," which Alphonse the doubtful had procured from the library that very morning. And it was a production admirably suited to a lady labouring under Mrs. Wititterly's complaint, seeing that there was not a line in it, from beginning to end, which could, by the most remote contingency, awaken the smallest excitement in any person breathing.

Kate read on.

"'Cherizette,' said the Lady Flabella, inserting her mouse-like feet in the blue satin slippers, which had unwittingly occasioned the half-playful half-angry altercation between herself and the youthful Colonel Befillaire, in the Duke of Mincefenille's *salon de danse* on the previous night. '*Cherizette, ma chère, donnez-moi de l'eau-de-Cologne, s'il vous plaît, mon enfant.*'

"'*Mercie*—thank you,' said the Lady Flabella, as the lively but devoted Cherizette plentifully besprinkled with the fragrant compound the Lady Flabella's *mouchoir* of finest cambric, edged with richest lace, and emblazoned at the four corners with the Flabella crest, and gorgeous heraldic bearings of that noble family. '*Mercie*—that will do.'

"At this instant, while the Lady Flabella yet inhaled that delicious fragrance by holding the *mouchoir* to her exquisite, but thoughtfully-chiselled nose, the door of the *boudoir* (artfully concealed by rich hangings of silken damask, the hue of Italy's firmament) was thrown open, and with noiseless tread two valets-de-chambre, clad in sumptuous liveries of peach-blossom and gold, advanced into the room, followed by a page in *bas de soie*—silk stockings—who, while they remained at some distance making the most graceful obeisances, advanced to the feet of his lovely mistress, and, dropping on one knee, presented, on a golden salver gorgeously chased, a scented *billet*.

"The Lady Flabella, with an agitation she could not repress, hastily tore off the *envelope* and broke the scented seal. It *was* from Befillaire—the young, the slim, the low-voiced—*her own* Befillaire."

"Oh, charming!" interrupted Kate's patroness, who was sometimes taken literary. "Poetic, really. Read that description again, Miss Nickleby."

Kate complied.

"Sweet indeed!" said Mrs. Wititterly with a sigh. "So voluptuous, is it not—so soft?"

"Yes, I think it is," replied Kate gently; "very soft."

"Close the book, Miss Nickleby," said Mrs. Wititterly. "I can hear nothing more to-day; I should be sorry to disturb the impression of that sweet description. Close the book."

Kate complied, not unwillingly; and, as she did so, Mrs. Wititterly raising her glass with a languid hand, remarked that she looked pale.

"It was the fright of that—that noise and confusion last night," said Kate.

"How very odd!" exclaimed Mrs. Wititterly with a look of surprise. And certainly, when one comes to think of it, it *was* very odd that anything should have disturbed a companion. A steam-engine, or other ingenious piece of mechanism out of order, would have been nothing to it.

"How did you come to know Lord Frederick, and those other delightful creatures, child?" asked Mrs. Wititterly, still eyeing Kate through her glass.

"I met them at my uncle's," said Kate, vexed to feel that she was colouring deeply, but unable to keep down the blood which rushed to her face whenever she thought of that man.

"Have you known them long?"

"No," rejoined Kate. "Not long."

"I was very glad of the opportunity which that respectable person, your mother, gave us of being known to them," said Mrs. Wititterly in a lofty manner. "Some friends of ours were on the very point of introducing us, which makes it quite remarkable."

This was said lest Miss Nickleby should grow conceited on the honour and dignity of having known four great people (for Pyke and Pluck were included among the delightful creatures), whom Mrs. Wititterly did not know. But, as the circumstance had made no impression one way or other upon Kate's mind, the force of the observation was quite lost upon her.

"They asked permission to call," said Mrs. Wititterly. "I gave it them, of course."

"Do you expect them to-day?" Kate ventured to inquire.

Mrs. Wititterly's answer was lost in the noise of a tremendous rapping at the street-door, and, before it had ceased to vibrate, there drove up a handsome cabriolet, out of which leaped Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend Lord Verisopht.

"They are here now," said Kate, rising and hurrying away.

"Miss Nickleby!" cried Mrs. Wititterly, perfectly aghast at a companion's attempting to quit the room without her permission first had and obtained. "Pray don't think of going."

"You are very good!" replied Kate. "But——"

"For goodness' sake, don't agitate me by making me speak so much," said Mrs. Wititterly with great sharpness. "Dear me, Miss Nickleby, I beg——"

It was in vain for Kate to protest that she was unwell, for the footsteps of the knockers, whoever they were, were already on the stairs. She resumed her seat, and had scarcely done so, when the doubtful page darted into the room, and announced Mr. Pyke, and Mr. Pluck, and Lord Verisopht, and Sir Mulberry Hawk, all at one burst.

"The most extraordinary thing in the world," said Mr. Pluck, saluting both ladies with the utmost cordiality; "the most extraordinary thing. As Lord Frederick and Sir Mulberry drove up to the door, Pyke and I had that instant knocked."

"That instant knocked," said Pyke.

"No matter how you came, so that you are here," said Mrs. Wititterly, who, by dint of lying on the same sofa for three years and a half, had got up quite a little pantomime of graceful attitudes, and now threw herself into the most striking of the whole series, to astonish the visitors. "I am delighted, I am sure."

"And how is Miss Nickleby?" said Sir Mulberry Hawk, accosting Kate, in a low voice—not so low, however, but that it reached the ears of Mrs. Wititterly.

"Why, she complains of suffering from the fright of last night," said the lady. "I am sure I don't wonder at it, for my nerves are quite torn to pieces."

"And yet you look," observed Sir Mulberry, turning round; "and yet you look——"

"Beyond everything," said Mr. Pyke, coming to his patron's assistance. Of course Mr. Pluck said the same.

"I am afraid Sir Mulberry is a flatterer, my lord," said Mrs. Wititterly, turning to that young gentleman, who had been sucking the head of his cane in silence, and staring at Kate.

"Oh, deyvlish!" replied Verisopht. Having given utterance to which remarkable sentiment, he occupied himself as before.

"Neither does Miss Nickleby look the worse," said Sir Mulberry, bending his bold gaze upon her. "She was always handsome, but upon my soul, ma'am, you seem to have imparted some of your own good looks to her besides."

To judge from the glow which suffused the poor girl's countenance after this speech, Mrs. Wititterly might, with some show of reason, have been supposed to have imparted to it some of that artificial bloom which decorated her own. Mrs. Wititterly admitted, though not with the best grace in the world, that Kate *did* look pretty. She began to think, too, that Sir Mulberry was not quite so agreeable a creature as she had at first supposed him; for, although a skilful flatterer is a most delightful companion, if you can keep him all to yourself, his taste becomes very doubtful when he takes to complimenting other people.

"Pyke," said the watchful Mr. Pluck, observing the effect which the praise of Miss Nickleby had produced.

"Well, Pluck," said Pyke.

"Is there anybody," demanded Mr. Pluck mysteriously, "anybody you know, that Mrs. Wititterly's profile reminds you of?"

"Reminds me of!" answered Pyke. "Of course there is."

"Who do you mean?" said Pluck in the same mysterious manner. "The D. of B.?"

"The C. of B.," replied Pyke, with the faintest trace of a grin lingering in his countenance. "The beautiful sister is the countess; not the duchess."

"True," said Pluck, "the C. of B. The resemblance is wonderful!"

"Perfectly startling," said Mr. Pyke.

Here was a state of things! Mrs. Wititterly was declared, upon the testimony of two veracious and competent witnesses, to be the very picture of a countess! This was one of the consequences of getting into good society. Why, she might have moved among grovelling people for twenty years, and never heard of it. How could she, indeed? What did *they* know about countesses?

The two gentlemen having, by the greediness with which this little bait was swallowed, tested the extent of Mrs. Wititterly's appetite for adulation, proceeded to administer that commodity in very large doses, thus affording to Sir Mulberry Hawk an opportunity of pestering Miss Nickleby with questions and remarks, to which she was absolutely obliged to make some reply. Meanwhile, Lord Verisopht enjoyed unmolested the full flavour of the gold knob at the top of his cane, as he would have done to the end of the interview if Mr. Wititterly had not come home, and caused the conversation to turn to his favourite topic.

"My lord," said Mr. Wititterly, "I am delighted—honoured—proud. Be seated again, my lord, pray. I am proud, indeed—most proud."

It was to the secret annoyance of his wife that Mr. Wititterly said all this, for, although she was bursting with pride and arrogance, she would have had the illustrious guests believe that their visit was quite a common occurrence, and that they had lords and baronets to see them every day in the week. But Mr. Wititterly's feelings were beyond the power of suppression.

"It is an honour, indeed!" said Mr. Wititterly. "Julia, my soul, you will suffer for this to-morrow."

"Suffer!" cried Lord Verisopht.

"The reaction, my lord, the reaction," said Mr. Wititterly. "This violent strain upon the nervous system over, my lord, what ensues? A sinking, a depression, a lowness, a lassitude, a debility. My lord, if Sir Tumley Snuffim was to see that delicate creature at this moment, he would not give a—a—*this* for her life." In illustration of which remark Mr. Wititterly took a pinch of snuff from his box, and jerked it lightly into the air as an emblem of instability.

"Not *that*," said Mr. Wititterly, looking about him with a serious countenance. "Sir Tumley Snuffim would not give that for Mrs. Wititterly's existence."

Mr. Wititterly told this with a kind of sober exultation, as if it were no trifling distinction for a man to have a wife in such a desperate state, and Mrs. Wititterly sighed and looked on, as if she felt the honour, but had determined to bear it as meekly as might be.

"Mrs. Wititterly," said her husband, "is Sir Tumley Snuffim's favourite patient. I believe I may venture to say that Mrs. Wititterly is the first person who took the new medicine which is supposed to have destroyed a family at Kensington Gravel Pits. I believe she was. If I am wrong, Julia, my dear, you will correct me."

"I believe I was," said Mrs. Wititterly in a faint voice.

As there appeared to be some doubt in the mind of his patron how he could best join in this conversation, the indefatigable Mr. Pyke threw himself into the breach, and, by way of saying something to the point, inquired—with reference to the aforesaid medicine—whether it was nice.

"No, sir, it was not. It had not even that recommendation," said Mr. W.

"Mrs. Wititterly is quite a martyr," observed Pyke with a complimentary bow.

"I *think* I am," said Mrs. Wititterly, smiling.

"I think you are, my dear Julia," replied her husband in a tone which seemed to say that he was not vain, but still must insist upon their privileges. "If anybody, my lord," added Mr. Wititterly, wheeling round to the nobleman, "will produce to me a greater martyr than Mrs. Wititterly, all I can say is, that I shall be glad to see that martyr, whether male or female—that's all, my lord."

Pyke and Pluck promptly remarked that certainly nothing could be fairer than that; and the call having been by this time protracted to a very great length, they obeyed Sir Mulberry's look, and rose to go. This brought Sir Mulberry himself and Lord Verisopht on their

legs also. Many protestations of friendship, and expressions anticipative of the pleasure which must inevitably flow from so happy an acquaintance, were exchanged, and the visitors departed, with renewed assurances that at all times and seasons the mansion of the Wititterlys would be honoured by receiving them beneath its roof.

That they came at all times and seasons—that they dined there one day, supped the next, dined again on the next, and were constantly to and fro on all—that they made parties to visit public places, and met by accident at lounges—that upon all these occasions Miss Nickleby was exposed to the constant and unremitting persecution of Sir Mulberry Hawk, who now began to feel his character, even in the estimation of his two dependants, involved in the successful reduction of her pride—that she had no intervals of peace or rest, except at those hours when she could sit in her solitary room, and weep over the trials of the day—all these were consequences naturally flowing from the well-laid plans of Sir Mulberry, and their able execution by the auxiliaries, Pyke and Pluck.

And thus for a fortnight matters went on. That any but the weakest and silliest of people could have seen in one interview that Lord Verisopht, though he was a lord, and Sir Mulberry Hawk, though he was a baronet, were not persons accustomed to be the best possible companions, and were certainly not calculated, by habits, manners, tastes, or conversation, to shine with any very great lustre in the society of ladies, need scarcely be remarked. But with Mrs. Wittiterly the two titles were all-sufficient; coarseness became humour, vulgarity softened itself down into the most charming eccentricity; insolence took the guise of an easy absence of reserve, attainable only by those who had had the good fortune to mix with high folks.

If the mistress put such a construction upon the behaviour of her new friends, what could the companion urge against them? If they accustomed themselves to very little restraint before the lady of the house, with how much more freedom could they address her paid dependant! Nor was even this the worst. As the odious Sir Mulberry Hawk attached himself to Kate with less and less of disguise, Mrs. Wititterly began to grow jealous of the superior attractions of Miss Nickleby. If this feeling had led to her banishment from the drawing-room when such company was there, Kate would have been only too happy and willing that it should have existed; but, unfortunately for her, she possessed that native grace and true gentility of manner, and those thousand nameless accomplishments, which give to female society its greatest charm. If these be valuable anywhere, they were especially so where the lady of the house was a mere animated doll. The consequence was, that Kate had the double mortification of being an indispensable part of the circle when Sir Mulberry and his friends were there, and of being exposed, on that very account, to all Mrs. Wititterly's ill-humours and caprices when they were gone. She became utterly and completely miserable.

Mrs. Wititterly had never thrown off the mask with regard to Sir Mulberry, but, when she was more than usually out of temper, attributed the circumstance, as ladies sometimes do, to nervous indisposition. However, as the dreadful idea that Lord Verisopht also was somewhat taken with Kate, and that she, Mrs. Wititterly, was quite a secondary person, dawned upon that lady's mind, and gradually developed itself, she became possessed with a large quantity of highly proper and most virtuous indignation, and felt it her duty, as a married lady and a moral member of society, to mention the circumstance to "the young person" without delay.

Accordingly, Mrs. Wititterly broke ground next morning during a pause in the novel-reading.

"Miss Nickleby," said Mrs. Wititterly, "I wish to speak to you very gravely. I am sorry to have to do it, upon my word I am very sorry, but you leave me no alternative, Miss Nickleby." Here Mrs. Wititterly tossed her head—not passionately, only virtuously—and remarked, with some appearance of excitement, that she feared that palpitation of the heart was coming on again.

"Your behaviour, Miss Nickleby," resumed the lady, "is very far from pleasing me—very far. I am very anxious indeed that you should do well, but you may depend upon it, Miss Nickleby, you will not, if you go on as you do."

"Ma'am!" exclaimed Kate proudly.

"Don't agitate me by speaking in that way, Miss Nickleby, don't," said Mrs. Wititterly with some violence, "or you'll compel me to ring the bell."

Kate looked at her, but said nothing.

"You needn't suppose," resumed Mrs. Wititterly, "that your looking at me in that way, Miss Nickleby, will prevent my saying what I am going to say, which I feel to be a religious duty. You needn't direct your glances towards me," said Mrs. Wititterly with a sudden burst of spite; "*I* am not Sir Mulberry, no, nor Lord

Frederick Verisopht, Miss Nickleby, nor am I Mr. Pyke, nor Mr. Pluck either."

Kate looked at her again, but less steadily than before; and, resting her elbow on the table, covered her eyes with her hand.

"If such things had been done when I was a young girl," said Mrs. Wititterly (this, by the way, must have been some little time before), I don't suppose anybody would have believed it."

"I don't think they would," murmured Kate. "I do not think anybody would believe, without actually knowing it, what I seem doomed to undergo!"

"Don't talk to me of being doomed to undergo, Miss Nickleby, if you please," said Mrs. Wititterly with a shrillness of tone quite surprising in so great an invalid. "I will not be answered, Miss Nickleby. I am not accustomed to be answered, nor will I permit it for an instant. Do you hear?" she added, waiting with some apparent inconsistency *for* an answer.

"I do hear you, ma'am," replied Kate, "with surprise—with greater surprise than I can express."

"I have always considered you a particularly well-behaved young person for your station in life," said Mrs. Wititterly; "and as you are a person of healthy appearance, and neat in your dress and so forth, I have taken an interest in you, as I do still, considering that I owe a sort of duty to that respectable old female, your mother. For these reasons, Miss Nickleby, I must tell you, once for all, and begging you to mind what I say, that I must insist upon your immediately altering your very forward behaviour to the gentlemen who visit at this house. It really is not becoming," said Mrs. Wititterly, closing her chaste eyes as she spoke; "it is improper—quite improper."

"Oh!" cried Kate, looking upwards and clasping her hands: "is not this, is not this too cruel, too hard to bear? Is it not enough that I should have suffered as I have, night and day; that I should almost have sunk in my own estimation from very shame of having been brought into contact with such people; but must I also be exposed to this unjust and most unfounded charge?"

"You will have the goodness to recollect, Miss Nickleby," said Mrs. Wititterly, "that when you use such terms as 'unjust' and 'unfounded,' you charge me, in effect, with stating that which is untrue."

"I do," said Kate with honest indignation. "Whether you make this accusation of yourself, or at the prompting of others, is alike to me. I say it *is* vilely, grossly, wilfully untrue. Is it possible," cried Kate, "that any one of my own sex can have sat by, and not have seen the misery these men have caused me? Is it possible that you, ma'am, can have been present, and failed to mark the insulting freedom that their every look bespoke? Is it possible that you can have avoided seeing that these libertines, in their utter disrespect for you, and utter disregard of all gentlemanly behaviour, and almost of decency, have had but one object in introducing themselves here, and that the furtherance of their designs upon a friendless, helpless girl, who, without this humiliating confession, might have hoped to receive from one so much her senior something like womanly aid and sympathy? I do not—I cannot believe it!"

If poor Kate had possessed the slightest knowledge of the world, she certainly would not have ventured, even in the excitement into which she had been lashed, upon such an injudicious speech as this. Its effect was precisely what a more experienced observer would have foreseen. Mrs. Wititterly received the attack upon her veracity with exemplary calmness, and listened with the most heroic fortitude to Kate's account of her own sufferings. But allusion being made to her being held in disregard by the gentlemen, she evinced violent emotion, and this blow was no sooner followed up by the remark concerning her seniority than she fell back upon the sofa, uttering dismal screams.

"What is the matter?" cried Mr. Wititterly, bouncing into the room. "Heavens, what do I see? Julia! Julia! look up, my life, look up!"

But Julia looked down most perseveringly, and screamed still louder; so Mr. Wititterly rang the bell, and danced in a frenzied manner round the sofa on which Mrs. Wititterly lay; uttering perpetual cries for Sir Tumley Snuffim, and never once leaving off to ask for any explanation of the scene before him.

"Run for Sir Tumley," cried Mr. Wititterly, menacing the page with both fists. "I knew it, Miss Nickleby," he said, looking round with an air of melancholy triumph; "that society has been too much for her. This is all soul, you know, every bit of it." With this assurance Mr. Wititterly took up the prostrate form of Mrs. Wititterly, and carried her bodily off to bed.

Kate waited until Sir Tumley Snuffim had paid his visit and looked in with a report that, through the special interposition of a merciful Providence (thus spake Sir Tumley), Mrs. Wititterly had gone to sleep. She then hastily attired

herself for walking, and, leaving word that she should return within a couple of hours, hurried away towards her uncle's house.

It had been a good day with Ralph Nickleby—quite a lucky day; and, as he walked to and fro in his little back-room with his hands clasped behind him, adding up in his own mind all the sums that had been, or would be, netted from the business done since morning, his mouth was drawn into a hard stern smile; while the firmness of the lines and curves that made it up, as well as the cunning glance of his cold, bright eye, seemed to tell that, if any resolution or cunning would increase the profits, they would not fail to be exerted for the purpose.

"Very good!" said Ralph, in allusion, no doubt, to some proceeding of the day. "He defies the usurer, does he? Well, we shall see. 'Honesty is the best policy,' is it? We'll try that too."

He stopped, and then walked on again.

"He is content," said Ralph, relaxing into a smile, "to set his known character and conduct against the power of money—dross, as he calls it. Why, what a dull blockhead this fellow must be! Dross, too—dross!—Who's that?"

"Me," said Newman Noggs, looking in. "Your niece."

"What of her?" asked Ralph sharply.

"She's here."

"Here!"

Newman jerked his head towards his little room, to signify that she was waiting there.

"What does she want?" asked Ralph.

"I don't know," rejoined Newman. "Shall I ask?" he added quickly.

"No," replied Ralph. "Show her in—stay." He hastily put away a padlocked cash-box that was on the table, and substituted in its stead an empty purse. "There!" said Ralph. "*Now* she may come in."

Newman, with a grim smile at this manœuvre, beckoned the young lady to advance, and, having placed a chair for her, retired; looking stealthily over his shoulder at Ralph as he limped slowly out.

"Well," said Ralph roughly enough, but still with something more of kindness in his manner than he would have exhibited towards anybody else. "Well, my—dear. What now?"

Kate raised her eyes, which were filled with tears; and, with an effort to master her emotion, strove to speak, but in vain. So, drooping her head again, she remained silent. Her face was hidden from his view, but Ralph could see that she was weeping.

"I can guess the cause of this!" thought Ralph after looking at her for some time in silence. "I can—I can guess the cause. Well! Well!"—thought Ralph—for the moment quite disconcerted, as he watched the anguish of his beautiful niece. "Where is the harm? Only a few tears; and it's an excellent lesson for her—an excellent lesson."

"What is the matter?" asked Ralph, drawing a chair opposite, and sitting down.

He was rather taken aback by the sudden firmness with which Kate looked up and answered him.

"The matter which brings me to you, sir," she said, "is one which should call the blood up into your cheeks, and make you burn to hear, as it does me to tell. I have been wronged; my feelings have been outraged, insulted, wounded past all healing, and by your friends."

"Friends!" cried Ralph sternly. "*I* have no friends, girl."

"By the men I saw here, then," returned Kate quickly. "If they were no friends of yours, and you knew what they were,—oh! the more shame on you, uncle, for bringing me among them. To have subjected me to what I was exposed to here, through any misplaced confidence or imperfect knowledge of your guests, would have required some strong excuse; but if you did it—as I now believe you did—knowing them well, it was most dastardly and cruel."

Ralph drew back in utter amazement at this plain speaking, and regarded Kate with the sternest look. But she met his gaze proudly and firmly, and, although her face was very pale, it looked more noble and handsome, lighted up as it was, than it had ever appeared before.

"There is some of that boy's blood in you, I see," said Ralph, speaking in his harshest tones, as something in the flashing eye reminded him of Nicholas at their last meeting.

"I hope there is!" replied Kate. "I should be proud to know it. I am young, uncle, and all the difficulties and miseries of my situation have kept it down, but I have been roused to-day beyond all endurance, and, come what may, *I will not*, as I am your brother's child, bear these insults longer."

"What insults, girl?" demanded Ralph sharply.

"Remember what took place here, and ask yourself," replied Kate, colouring deeply. "Uncle, you must—I am sure you will—release me from such vile and degrading companionship as I am exposed to now. I do not mean," said Kate, hurrying to the old man, and laying her

arm upon his shoulder, "I do not mean to be angry and violent—I beg your pardon if I have seemed so, dear uncle—but you do not know what I have suffered, you do not indeed. You cannot tell what the heart of a young girl is—I have no right to expect you should; but when I tell you that I am wretched, and that my heart is breaking, I am sure you will help me. I am sure, I am sure you will!"

Ralph looked at her for an instant; then turned away his head, and beat his foot nervously upon the ground.

"I have gone on day after day," said Kate, bending over him, and timidly placing her little hand in his, "in the hope that this persecution would cease; I have gone on day after day, compelled to assume the appearance of cheerfulness when I was most unhappy. I have had no counsellor, no adviser, no one to protect me. Mamma supposes that these are honourable men, rich and distinguished, and how *can* I—how can I undeceive her—when she is so happy in these little delusions, which are the only happiness she has? The lady with whom you placed me is not the person to whom I could confide matters of so much delicacy, and I have come at last to you, the only friend I have at hand—almost the only friend I have at all—to entreat and implore you to assist me."

"How can *I* assist you, child?" said Ralph, rising from his chair, and pacing up and down the room in his old attitude.

"You have influence with one of these men, I *know*," rejoined Kate emphatically. "Would not a word from you induce them to desist from this unmanly course?"

"No," said Ralph, suddenly turning; "at least—that—I can't say it, if it would."

"Can't say it!"

"No," said Ralph, coming to a dead stop, and clasping his hands more tightly behind him. "I can't say it."

Kate fell back a step or two, and looked at him, as if in doubt whether she had heard aright.

"We are connected in business," said Ralph, poising himself alternately on his toes and heels, and looking coolly in his niece's face, "in business, and I can't afford to offend them. What is it, after all? We have all our trials, and this is one of yours. Some girls would be proud to have such gallants at their feet."

"Proud!" cried Kate.

"I don't say," rejoined Ralph, raising his forefinger, "but that you do right to despise them; no, you show your good sense in that, as, indeed, I knew from the first you would. Well! In all other respects you are comfortably bestowed. It's not much to bear. If this young lord does dog your footsteps, and whisper his drivelling inanities in your ears, what of it? It's a dishonourable passion. So be it; it won't last long. Some other novelty will spring up one day, and you will be released. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime," interrupted Kate with becoming pride and indignation, "I am to be the scorn of my own sex, and the toy of the other; justly condemned by all women of right feeling, and despised by all honest and honourable men; sunken in my own esteem, and degraded in every eye that looks upon me. No, not if I work my fingers to the bone, not if I am driven to the roughest and hardest labour. Do not mistake me. I will not disgrace your recommendation. I will remain in the house in which it placed me, until I am entitled to leave it by the terms of my engagement;—though, mind, I see these men no more. When I quit it, I will hide myself from them and you, and, striving to support my mother by hard service, I will live, at least, in peace, and trust in God to help me."

With these words, she waved her hand, and quitted the room, leaving Ralph Nickleby motionless as a statue.

The surprise with which Kate, as she closed the room-door, beheld, close beside it, Newman Noggs standing bolt upright in a little niche in the wall like some scarecrow or Guy Fawkes laid up in winter quarters, almost occasioned her to call aloud. But, Newman laying his finger upon his lips, she had the presence of mind to refrain.

"Don't," said Newman, gliding out of his recess, and accompanying her across the hall. "Don't cry, don't cry." Two very large tears, by-the-bye, were running down Newman's face as he spoke.

"I see how it is," said poor Noggs, drawing from his pocket what seemed to be a very old duster, and wiping Kate's eyes with it as gently as if she were an infant. "You're giving way now. Yes, yes, very good; that's right, I like that. It was right not to give way before him. Yes, yes! Ha, ha, ha! Oh yes! Poor thing!"

With these disjointed exclamations, Newman wiped his own eyes with the afore-mentioned duster, and, limping to the street-door, opened it to let her out.

"Don't cry any more," whispered Newman. "I shall see you soon. Ha! ha! ha! And so shall somebody else, too. Yes, yes. Ho! ho!"

"God bless you," answered Kate, hurrying out, "God bless you!"

"Same to you," rejoined Newman, opening the door again a little way to say so. "Ha, ha, ha! Ho! ho! ho!"

And Newman Noggs opened the door once again to nod cheerfully, and laugh—and shut it, to shake his head mournfully, and cry.

Ralph remained in the same attitude till he heard the noise of the closing door, when he shrugged his shoulders, and after a few turns about the room—hasty at first, but gradually

"I SEE HOW IT IS," SAID POOR NOGGS, DRAWING FROM HIS POCKET WHAT SEEMED TO BE A VERY OLD DUSTER, AND WIPING KATE'S EYES WITH IT AS GENTLY AS IF SHE WERE AN INFANT.

becoming slower, as he relapsed into himself—sat down before his desk.

It is one of those problems of human nature which may be noted down, but not solved;—although Ralph felt no remorse at that moment for his conduct towards the innocent, true-hearted girl; although his libertine clients had done precisely what he had expected, precisely what he most wished, and precisely what would tend most to his advantage, still he hated them for doing it, from the very bottom of his soul.

"Ugh!" said Ralph, scowling round, and

shaking his clenched hand as the faces of the two profligates rose up before his mind; "you shall pay for this! Oh! you shall pay for this!"

As the usurer turned for consolation to his books and papers, a performance was going on outside his office door, which would have occasioned him no small surprise, if he could by any means have become acquainted with it.

Newman Noggs was the sole actor. He stood at a little distance from the door, with his face towards it; and, with the sleeves of his coat turned back at the wrists, was occupied in bestowing the most vigorous, scientific, and straightforward blows upon the empty air.

At first sight, this would have appeared merely a wise precaution in a man of sedentary habits, with the view of opening the chest and strengthening the muscles of the arms. But the intense eagerness and joy depicted in the face of Newman Noggs, which was suffused with perspiration; the surprising energy with which he directed a constant succession of blows towards a particular panel about five feet eight from the ground, and still worked away in the most untiring and persevering manner, would have sufficiently explained, to the attentive observer, that his imagination was thrashing, to within an inch of his life, his body's most active employer, Mr. Ralph Nickleby.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF NICHOLAS, AND CERTAIN INTERNAL DIVISIONS IN THE COMPANY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES.

THE unexpected success and favour with which his experiment at Portsmouth had been received, induced Mr. Crummles to prolong his stay in that town for a fortnight beyond the period he had originally assigned for the duration of his visit, during which time Nicholas personated a vast variety of characters with undiminished success, and attracted so many people to the theatre who had never been seen there before, that a benefit was considered by the manager a very promising speculation. Nicholas assenting to the terms proposed, the benefit was had, and by it he realised no less a sum than twenty pounds.

Possessed of this unexpected wealth, his first act was to enclose to honest John Browdie the amount of his friendly loan, which he accompanied with many expressions of gratitude and esteem, and many cordial wishes for his matrimonial happiness. To Newman Noggs he forwarded one half of the sum he had realised, entreating him to take an opportunity of handing it to Kate in secret, and conveying to her the warmest assurances of his love and affection. He made no mention of the way in which he had employed himself; merely informing Newman that a letter addressed to him under his assumed name at the Post Office, Portsmouth, would readily find him, and entreating that worthy friend to write full particulars of the situation of his mother and sister, and an account of all the grand things that Ralph Nickleby had done for them since his departure from London.

"You are out of spirits," said Smike on the night after the letter had been dispatched.

"Not I!" rejoined Nicholas with assumed gaiety, for the confession would have made the boy miserable all night; "I was thinking about my sister, Smike."

"Sister!"

"Ay."

"Is she like you?" inquired Smike.

"Why, so they say," replied Nicholas, laughing, "only a great deal handsomer."

"She must be *very* beautiful," said Smike, after thinking a little while with his hands folded together, and his eyes bent upon his friend.

"Anybody who didn't know you as well as I do, my dear fellow, would say you were an accomplished courtier," said Nicholas.

"I don't even know what that is," replied Smike, shaking his head. "Shall I ever see your sister?"

"To be sure," cried Nicholas; "we shall all be together one of these days—when we are rich, Smike."

"How is it that you, who are so kind and good to me, have nobody to be kind to you?" asked Smike. "I cannot make that out."

"Why, it is a long story," replied Nicholas, "and one you would have some difficulty in comprehending, I fear. I have an enemy—you understand what that is?"

"Oh yes, I understand that!" said Smike.

"Well, it is owing to him," returned Nicholas. "He is rich, and not so easily punished as *your* old enemy, Mr. Squeers. He is my uncle, but he is a villain, and has done me wrong."

"Has he, though?" asked Smike, bending eagerly forward. "What is his name? Tell me his name."

"Ralph—Ralph Nickleby."

"Ralph Nickleby," repeated Smike. "Ralph. I'll get that name by heart."

He had muttered it over to himself some twenty times, when a loud knock at the door

disturbed him from his occupation. Before he could open it, Mr. Folair, the pantomimist, thrust in his head.

Mr. Folair's head was usually decorated with a very round hat, unusually high in the crown, and curled up quite tight in the brims. On the present occasion he wore it very much on one side, with the back part forward in consequence of its being the least rusty; round his neck he wore a flaming red worsted comforter, whereof the straggling ends peeped out beneath his threadbare Newmarket coat, which was very tight, and buttoned all the way up. He carried in his hand one very dirty glove, and a cheap dress-cane with a glass handle; in short, his whole appearance was unusually dashing, and demonstrated a far more scrupulous attention to his toilet than he was in the habit of bestowing upon it.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr. Folair, taking off the tall hat, and running his fingers through his hair. "I bring a communication. Hem!"

"From whom, and what about?" inquired Nicholas. "You are unusually mysterious to-night."

"Cold, perhaps," returned Mr. Folair; "cold, perhaps. That is the fault of my position—not of myself, Mr. Johnson. My position as a mutual friend requires it, sir." Mr. Folair paused with a most impressive look, and, diving into the hat before noticed, drew from thence a small piece of whity-brown paper curiously folded, whence he brought forth a note which it had served to keep clean, and handing it over to Nicholas, said—

"Have the goodness to read that, sir."

Nicholas, in a state of much amazement, took the note and broke the seal, glancing at Mr. Folair as he did so, who, knitting his brow and pursing up his mouth with great dignity, was sitting with his eyes steadily fixed upon the ceiling.

It was directed to blank Johnson, Esq., by favour of Augustus Folair, Esq.; and the astonishment of Nicholas was in no degree lessened when he found it to be couched in the following laconic terms:—

"Mr. Lenville presents his kind regards to Mr. Johnson, and will feel obliged if he will inform him at what hour to-morrow morning it will be most convenient to him to meet Mr. L. at the Theatre, for the purpose of having his nose pulled in the presence of the company.

"Mr. Lenville requests Mr. Johnson not to neglect making an appointment, as he has invited two or three professional friends to witness the ceremony, and cannot disappoint them upon any account whatever.

"*Portsmouth, Tuesday night.*"

Indignant as he was at this impertinence, there was something so exquisitely absurd in such a cartel of defiance, that Nicholas was obliged to bite his lip and read the note over two or three times before he could muster sufficient gravity and sternness to address the hostile messenger, who had not taken his eyes from the ceiling, nor altered the expression of his face in the slightest degree.

"Do you know the contents of this note, sir?" he asked at length.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Folair, looking round for an instant, and immediately carrying his eyes back again to the ceiling.

"And how dare you bring it here, sir?" asked Nicholas, tearing it into very little pieces, and jerking it in a shower towards the messenger. "Had you no fear of being kicked down-stairs, sir?"

Mr. Folair turned his head—now ornamented with several fragments of the note—towards Nicholas, and, with the same imperturbable dignity, briefly replied, "No."

"Then," said Nicholas, taking up the tall hat, and tossing it towards the door, "you had better follow that article of your dress, sir, or you may find yourself very disagreeably deceived, and that within a dozen seconds."

"I say, Johnson," remonstrated Mr. Folair, suddenly losing all his dignity, "none of that, you know. No tricks with a gentleman's wardrobe."

"Leave the room," returned Nicholas. "How could you presume to come here on such an errand, you scoundrel?"

"Pooh! pooh!" said Mr. Folair, unwinding his comforter, and gradually getting himself out of it. "There—that's enough!"

"Enough!" cried Nicholas, advancing towards him. "Take yourself off, sir!"

"Pooh! pooh! I tell you," returned Mr. Folair, waving his hand in deprecation of any further wrath, "I wasn't in earnest. I only brought it in joke."

"You had better be careful how you indulge in such jokes again," said Nicholas, "or you may find an allusion to pulling noses rather a dangerous reminder for the subject of your facetiousness. Was it written in joke, too, pray?"

"No, no, that's the best of it," returned the actor; "right-down earnest—honour bright."

Nicholas could not repress a smile at the odd

figure before him, which, at all times more calculated to provoke mirth than anger, was especially so at that moment, when, with one knee upon the ground, Mr. Folair twirled his old hat round upon his hand, and affected the extremest agony lest any of the nap should have been knocked off—an ornament which, it is almost superfluous to say, it had not boasted for many months.

"Come, sir," said Nicholas, laughing in spite of himself. "Have the goodness to explain."

"Why, I'll tell you how it is," said Mr. Folair, sitting himself down in a chair with great coolness. "Since you came here Lenville has done nothing but second business, and, instead of having a reception every night as he used to have, they have let him come on as if he was nobody."

"What do you mean by a reception?" asked Nicholas.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Mr. Folair, "what an unsophisticated shepherd you are, Johnson! Why, applause from the house when you first come on. So he has gone on night after night, never getting a hand, and you getting a couple of rounds at least, and sometimes three, till at length he got quite desperate, and had half a mind last night to play Tybalt with a real sword, and pink you—not dangerously, but just enough to lay you up for a month or two."

"Very considerate," remarked Nicholas.

"Yes, I think it was under the circumstances; his professional reputation being at stake," said Mr. Folair quite seriously. "But his heart failed him, and he cast about for some other way of annoying you, and making himself popular at the same time—for that's the point. Notoriety, notoriety, is the thing. Bless you, if he had pinked you," said Mr. Folair, stopping to make a calculation in his mind, "it would have been worth—ah! it would have been worth eight or ten shillings a week to him. All the town would have come to see the actor who nearly killed a man by mistake; I shouldn't wonder if it had got him an engagement in London. However, he was obliged to try some other mode of getting popular, and this one occurred to him. It's a clever idea, really. If you had shown the white feather, and let him pull your nose, he'd have got it into the paper; if you had sworn the peace against him, it would have been in the paper too, and he'd have been just as much talked about as you—don't you see?"

"Oh, certainly!" rejoined Nicholas; "but suppose I were to turn the tables, and pull *his* nose, what then? Would that make his fortune?"

"Why, I don't think it would," replied Mr. Folair, scratching his head, "because there wouldn't be any romance about it, and he wouldn't be favourably known. To tell you the truth, though, he didn't calculate much upon that, for you're always so mild-spoken, and are so popular among the women, that we didn't suspect you of showing fight. If you did, however, he has a way of getting out of it easily, depend upon that."

"Has he?" rejoined Nicholas. "We will try to-morrow morning. In the meantime, you can give whatever account of our interview you like best. Good night."

As Mr. Folair was pretty well known among his fellow-actors for a man who delighted in mischief, and was by no means scrupulous, Nicholas had not much doubt but that he had secretly prompted the tragedian in the course he had taken, and, moreover, that he would have carried his mission with a very high hand if he had not been disconcerted by the very unexpected demonstrations with which it had been received. It was not worth his while to be serious with him, however, so he dismissed the pantomimist, with a gentle hint that, if he offended again, it would be under the penalty of a broken head; and Mr. Folair, taking the caution in exceedingly good part, walked away to confer with his principal, and give such an account of his proceedings as he might think best calculated to carry on the joke.

He had no doubt reported that Nicholas was in a state of extreme bodily fear; for, when that young gentleman walked with much deliberation down to the theatre next morning at the usual hour, he found all the company assembled in evident expectation, and Mr. Lenville, with his severest stage face, sitting majestically on a table, whistling defiance.

Now, the ladies were on the side of Nicholas, and the gentlemen (being jealous) were on the side of the disappointed tragedian; so that the latter formed a little group about the redoubtable Mr. Lenville, and the former looked on at a little distance in some trepidation and anxiety. On Nicholas stopping to salute them, Mr. Lenville laughed a scornful laugh, and made some general remark touching the natural history of puppies.

"Oh!" said Nicholas, looking quietly round, "are you there?"

"Slave!" returned Mr. Lenville, flourishing his right arm, and approaching Nicholas with a theatrical stride. But, somehow, he appeared just at that moment a little startled, as if Nicholas did not look quite so frightened as he had expected, and came all at once to an awk-

ward halt, at which the assembled ladies burst into a shrill laugh.

"Object of my scorn and hatred!" said Mr. Lenville, "I hold ye in contempt."

Nicholas laughed in very unexpected enjoyment of this performance; and the ladies, by way of encouragement, laughed louder than before; whereat Mr. Lenville assumed his bitterest smile, and expressed his opinion that they were "minions."

"But they shall not protect ye!" said the tragedian, taking an upward look at Nicholas, beginning at his boots and ending at the crown of his head, and then a downward one, beginning at the crown of his head and ending at his boots—which two looks, as everybody knows, express defiance on the stage. "They shall not protect ye—boy!"

Thus speaking, Mr. Lenville folded his arms, and treated Nicholas to that expression of face

"BUT THEY SHALL NOT PROTECT YE!" SAID THE TRAGEDIAN, TAKING AN UPWARD LOOK AT NICHOLAS, BEGINNING AT HIS BOOTS AND ENDING AT THE CROWN OF HIS HEAD, ETC.

with which, in melodramatic performances, he was in the habit of regarding the tyrannical kings when they said, "Away with him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat;" and which, accompanied with a little jingling of fetters, had been known to produce great effects in its time.

Whether it was the absence of the fetters or not, it made no very deep impression on Mr. Lenville's adversary, however, but rather seemed to increase the good-humour expressed in his countenance; in which stage of the contest, one or two gentlemen, who had come out expressly to witness the pulling of Nicholas's nose, grew impatient, murmuring that, if it were to be done at all, it had better be done at once, and that, if Mr. Lenville didn't mean to do it, he had better say so, and not keep them waiting there. Thus urged, the tragedian adjusted the cuff of his right coat-sleeve for the performance of the

operation, and walked in a very stately manner up to Nicholas, who suffered him to approach to within the requisite distance, and then, without the smallest discomposure, knocked him down.

Before the discomfited tragedian could raise his head from the boards, Mrs. Lenville (who, as has been before hinted, was in an interesting state) rushed from the rear rank of ladies, and, uttering a piercing scream, threw herself upon the body.

"Do you see this, monster? Do you see *this?*" cried Mr. Lenville, sitting up, and pointing to his prostrate lady, who was holding him very tight round the waist.

"Come," said Nicholas, nodding his head, "apologise for the insolent note you wrote to me last night, and waste no more time in talking."

"Never!" cried Mr. Lenville.

"Yes—yes—yes!" screamed his wife. "For my sake—for mine, Lenville—forego all idle forms, unless you would see me a blighted corse at your feet."

"This is affecting!" said Mr. Lenville, looking round him, and drawing the back of his hand across his eyes. "The ties of nature are strong. The weak husband and the father—the father that is yet to be—relents. I apologise."

"Humbly and submissively?" said Nicholas.

"Humbly and submissively," returned the tragedian, scowling upwards. "But only to save her,—for a time will come——"

"Very good," said Nicholas; "I hope Mrs. Lenville may have a good one; and when it does come, and you are a father, you shall retract it if you have the courage. There! Be careful, sir, to what lengths your jealousy carries you another time; and be careful, also, before you venture too far, to ascertain your rival's temper." With this parting advice Nicholas picked up Mr. Lenville's ash stick, which had flown out of his hand, and, breaking it in half, threw him the pieces and withdrew, bowing slightly to the spectators as he walked out.

The profoundest deference was paid to Nicholas that night, and the people who had been most anxious to have his nose pulled in the morning, embraced occasions of taking him aside, and telling him, with great feeling, how very friendly they took it that he should have treated that Lenville so properly, who was a most unbearable fellow, and on whom they had all, by a remarkable coincidence, at one time or other contemplated the infliction of condign punishment, which they had only been restrained from administering by considerations of mercy; indeed, to judge from the invariable termination of all these stories, there never was such a charitable and kind-hearted set of people as the male members of Mr. Crummles's company.

Nicholas bore his triumph, as he had his success in the little world of the theatre, with the utmost moderation and good-humour. The crest-fallen Mr. Lenville made an expiring effort to obtain revenge by sending a boy into the gallery to hiss, but he fell a sacrifice to popular indignation, and was promptly turned out without having his money back.

"Well, Smike," said Nicholas when the first piece was over, and he had almost finished dressing to go home, "is there any letter yet?"

"Yes," replied Smike, "I got this one from the post-office."

"From Newman Noggs," said Nicholas, casting his eye upon the cramped direction; "it's no easy matter to make his writing out. Let me see—let me see."

By dint of poring over the letter for half an hour, he contrived to make himself master of the contents, which were certainly not of a nature to set his mind at ease. Newman took upon himself to send back the ten pounds, observing that he had ascertained that neither Mrs. Nickleby nor Kate was in actual want of money at the moment, and that a time might shortly come when Nicholas might want it more. He entreated him not to be alarmed at what he was about to say;—there was no bad news—they were in good health—but he thought circumstances might occur, or were occurring, which would render it absolutely necessary that Kate should have her brother's protection, and if so, Newman said, he would write to him to that effect, either by the next post or the next but one.

Nicholas read this passage very often, and, the more he thought of it, the more he began to fear some treachery upon the part of Ralph. Once or twice he felt tempted to repair to London at all hazards without an hour's delay, but a little reflection assured him that, if such a step were necessary, Newman would have spoken out, and told him so at once.

"At all events, I should prepare them here for the possibility of my going away suddenly," said Nicholas; "I should lose no time in doing that." As the thought occurred to him, he took up his hat and hurried to the green-room.

"Well, Mr. Johnson," said Mrs. Crummles, who was seated there in full regal costume, with the phenomenon as the Maiden in her maternal arms, "next week for Ryde, then for Winchester, then for——"

"I have some reason to fear," interrupted

Nicholas, "that, before you leave here, my career with you will have closed."

"Closed!" cried Mrs. Crummles, raising her hands in astonishment.

"Closed!" cried Miss Snevellicci, trembling so much in her tights that she actually laid her hand upon the shoulder of the manageress for support.

"Why, he don't mean to say he's going?" exclaimed Mrs. Grudden, making her way towards Mrs. Crummles. "Hoity-toity! nonsense!"

The phenomenon, being of an affectionate nature, and moreover excitable, raised a loud cry, and Miss Belvawney and Miss Bravassa actually shed tears. Even the male performers stopped in their conversation, and echoed the word "Going!" although some among them (and they had been the loudest in their congratulations that day) winked at each other, as though they would not be sorry to lose such a favourite rival; an opinion, indeed, which the honest Mr. Folair, who was ready dressed for the savage, openly stated in so many words to a demon with whom he was sharing a pot of porter.

Nicholas briefly said that he feared it would be so, although he could not yet speak with any degree of certainty; and, getting away as soon as he could, went home to con Newman's letter once more, and speculate upon it afresh.

How trifling all that had been occupying his time and thoughts for many weeks seemed to him during that sleepless night, and how constantly and incessantly present to his imagination was the one idea that Kate, in the midst of some great trouble and distress, might even then be looking—and vainly, too—for him!

CHAPTER XXX.

FESTIVITIES ARE HELD IN HONOUR OF NICHOLAS, WHO SUDDENLY WITHDRAWS HIMSELF FROM THE SOCIETY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES AND HIS THEATRICAL COMPANIONS.

MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES was no sooner acquainted with the public announcement which Nicholas had made relative to the probability of his shortly ceasing to be a member of the company, than he evinced many tokens of grief and consternation; and, in the extremity of his despair, even held out certain vague promises of a speedy improvement not only in the amount of his regular salary, but also in the contingent emoluments appertaining to his authorship. Finding Nicholas bent upon quitting the society—for he had now determined that, even if no further tidings came from Newman, he would, at all hazards, ease his mind by repairing to London and ascertaining the exact position of his sister—Mr. Crummles was fain to content himself by calculating the chances of his coming back again, and taking prompt and energetic measures to make the most of him before he went away.

"Let me see," said Mr. Crummles, taking off his outlaw's wig, the better to arrive at a cool-headed view of the whole case. "Let me see. This is Wednesday night. We'll have posters out the first thing in the morning, announcing positively your last appearance for to-morrow."

"But perhaps it may not be my last appearance, you know," said Nicholas. "Unless I am summoned away, I should be sorry to inconvenience you by leaving before the end of the week."

"So much the better," returned Mr. Crummles. "We can have positively your last appearance on Thursday—re-engagement for one night more on Friday—and, yielding to the wishes of numerous influential patrons, who were disappointed in obtaining seats, on Saturday. That ought to bring three very decent houses."

"Then I am to make three last appearances, am I?" inquired Nicholas, smiling.

"Yes," rejoined the manager, scratching his head with an air of some vexation; "three is not enough, and it's very bungling and irregular not to have more, but if we can't help it we can't, so there's no use in talking. A novelty would be very desirable. You couldn't sing a comic song on the pony's back, could you?"

"No," replied Nicholas, "I couldn't indeed."

"It has drawn money before now," said Mr. Crummles with a look of disappointment. "What do you think of a brilliant display of fireworks?"

"That it would be rather expensive," replied Nicholas drily.

"Eighteen-pence would do it," said Mr. Crummles. "You on the top of a pair of steps with the phenomenon in an attitude; 'Farewell' on a transparency behind; and nine people at the wings with a squib in each hand—all the dozen and a half going off at once—it would be very grand—awful from the front, quite awful."

As Nicholas appeared by no means impressed with the solemnity of the proposed effect, but, on the contrary, received the proposition in a most irreverent manner, and laughed at it very heartily, Mr. Crummles abandoned the project

in its birth, and gloomily observed that they must make up the best bill they could with combats and hornpipes, and so stick to the legitimate drama.

For the purpose of carrying this object into instant execution, the manager at once repaired to a small dressing-room adjacent, where Mrs. Crummles was then occupied in exchanging the habiliments of a melodramatic empress for the ordinary attire of matrons in the nineteenth century. And with the assistance of this lady, and the accomplished Mrs. Grudden (who had quite a genius for making out bills, being a great hand at throwing in the notes of admiration, and knowing from long experience exactly where the largest capitals ought to go), he seriously applied himself to the composition of the poster.

"Heigho!" sighed Nicholas, as he threw himself back in the prompter's chair, after telegraphing the needful directions to Smike, who had been playing a meagre tailor in the interlude, with one skirt to his coat, and a little pocket-handkerchief with a large hole in it, and a woollen nightcap, and a red nose, and other distinctive marks peculiar to tailors on the stage. "Heigho! I wish all this were over."

"Over, Mr. Johnson!" repeated a female voice behind him in a kind of plaintive surprise.

"It was an ungallant speech, certainly," said Nicholas, looking up to see who the speaker was, and recognising Miss Snevellicci. "I would not have made it if I had known you had been within hearing."

"What a dear that Mr. Digby is!" said Miss Snevellicci as the tailor went off on the opposite side, at the end of the piece, with great applause. (Smike's theatrical name was Digby.)

"I'll tell him presently, for his gratification, that you said so," returned Nicholas.

"Oh, you naughty thing!" rejoined Miss Snevellicci. "I don't know, though, that I should much mind *his* knowing my opinion of him; with some other people, indeed, it might be——" Here Miss Snevellicci stopped, as though waiting to be questioned, but no questioning came, for Nicholas was thinking about more serious matters.

"How kind it is of you," resumed Miss Snevellicci after a short silence, "to sit waiting here for him night after night, night after night, no matter how tired you are; and taking so much pains with him, and doing it all with as much delight and readiness as if you were coining gold by it!"

"He well deserves all the kindness I can show him, and a great deal more," said Nicholas. "He is the most grateful, single-hearted, affectionate creature that ever breathed."

"So odd, too," remarked Miss Snevellicci, "isn't he?"

"God help him, and those who have made him so; he is indeed," rejoined Nicholas, shaking his head.

"He is such a devilish close chap," said Mr. Folair, who had come up a little before, and now joined in the conversation. "Nobody can ever get anything out of him."

"What *should* they get out of him?" asked Nicholas, turning round with some abruptness.

"Zooks! what a fire-eater you are, Johnson!" returned Mr. Folair, pulling up the heel of his dancing shoe. "I'm only talking of the natural curiosity of the people here to know what he has been about all his life."

"Poor fellow! it is pretty plain, I should think, that he has not the intellect to have been about anything of much importance to them or anybody else," said Nicholas.

"Ay," rejoined the actor, contemplating the effect of his face in a lamp reflector, "but that involves the whole question, you know."

"What question?" asked Nicholas.

"Why, the who he is and what he is, and how you two, who are so different, came to be such close companions," replied Mr. Folair, delighted with the opportunity of saying something disagreeable. "That's in everybody's mouth."

"The 'everybody' of the theatre, I suppose?" said Nicholas contemptuously.

"In it and out of it too," replied the actor. "Why, you know, Lenville says——"

"I thought I had silenced him effectually," interrupted Nicholas, reddening.

"Perhaps you have," rejoined the immovable Mr. Folair; "if you have, he said this before he was silenced: Lenville says that you're a regular stick of an actor, and that it's only the mystery about you that has caused you to go down with the people here, and that Crummles keeps it up for his own sake; though Lenville says he don't believe there's anything at all in it, except your having got into a scrape, and run away from somewhere, for doing something or other."

"Oh!" said Nicholas, forcing a smile.

"That's a part of what he says," added Mr. Folair. "I mention it as the friend of both parties, and in strict confidence. *I* don't agree with him, you know. He says he takes Digby to be more knave than fool; and old Fluggers, who does the heavy business, you know, *he* says that when he delivered messages at Covent Garden the season before last, there used to be

a pickpocket hovering about the coach-stand who had exactly the face of Digby; though, as he very properly says, Digby may not be the same, but only his brother, or some near relation."

"Oh!" cried Nicholas again.

"Yes," said Mr. Folair with undisturbed calmness, "that's what they say. I thought I'd tell you, because really you ought to know. Oh! here's this blessed phenomenon at last. Ugh, you little imposition, I should like to—quite ready, my darling—humbug—ring up, Mrs. G., and let the favourite wake 'em."

Uttering in a loud voice such of the latter allusions as were complimentary to the unconscious phenomenon, and giving the rest in a confidential "aside" to Nicholas, Mr. Folair followed the ascent of the curtain with his eyes, regarded with a sneer the reception of Miss Crummles as the Maiden, and, falling back a step or two to advance with the better effect, uttered a preliminary howl, and "went on" chattering his teeth and brandishing his tin tomahawk as the Indian Savage.

"So these are some of the stories they invent about us, and bandy from mouth to mouth!" thought Nicholas. "If a man would commit an inexpiable offence against any society, large or small, let him be successful. They will forgive him any crime but that."

"You surely don't mind what that malicious creature says, Mr. Johnson?" observed Miss Snevellicci in her most winning tones.

"Not I," replied Nicholas. "If I were going to remain here, I might think it worth my while to embroil myself. As it is, let them talk till they are hoarse. But here," added Nicholas as Smike approached, "here comes the subject of a portion of their good-nature, so let he and I say good night together."

"No, I will not let either of you say anything of the kind," returned Miss Snevellicci. "You must come home and see mamma, who only came to Portsmouth to-day, and is dying to behold you. Led, my dear, persuade Mr. Johnson."

"Oh, I'm sure," returned Miss Ledrook with considerable vivacity, "if *you* can't persuade him——" Miss Ledrook said no more, but intimated, by a dexterous playfulness, that if Miss Snevellicci couldn't persuade him, nobody could.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lillyvick have taken lodgings in our house, and share our sitting-room for the present," said Miss Snevellicci. "Won't that induce you?"

"Surely," returned Nicholas, "I can require no possible inducement beyond your invitation."

"Oh no! I dare say," rejoined Miss Snevellicci. And Miss Ledrook said, "Upon my word!" Upon which Miss Snevellicci said that Miss Ledrook was a giddy thing; and Miss Ledrook said that Miss Snevellicci needn't colour up quite so much; and Miss Snevellicci beat Miss Ledrook, and Miss Ledrook beat Miss Snevellicci.

"Come," said Miss Ledrook, "it's high time we were there, or we shall have poor Mrs. Snevellicci thinking that you have run away with her daughter, Mr. Johnson; and then we should have a pretty to-do."

"My dear Led," remonstrated Miss Snevellicci, "how you do talk!"

Miss Ledrook made no answer, but, taking Smike's arm in hers, left her friend and Nicholas to follow at their pleasure; which it pleased them, or rather pleased Nicholas, who had no great fancy for a *tête-à-tête* under the circumstances, to do at once.

There were not wanting matters of conversation when they reached the street, for it turned out that Miss Snevellicci had a small basket to carry home, and Miss Ledrook a small bandbox, both containing such minor articles of theatrical costume as the lady performers usually carried to and fro every evening. Nicholas would insist upon carrying the basket, and Miss Snevellicci would insist upon carrying it herself, which gave rise to a struggle, in which Nicholas captured the basket, and the bandbox likewise. Then Nicholas said that he wondered what could possibly be inside the basket, and attempted to peep in, whereat Miss Snevellicci screamed, and declared that, if she thought he had seen, she was sure she should faint away. This declaration was followed by a similar attempt on the bandbox, and similar demonstrations on the part of Miss Ledrook, and then both ladies vowed that they wouldn't move a step further until Nicholas had promised that he wouldn't offer to peep again. At last Nicholas pledged himself to betray no further curiosity, and they walked on: both ladies giggling very much, and declaring that they never had seen such a wicked creature in all their born days—never.

Lightening the way with such pleasantry as this, they arrived at the tailor's house in no time; and here they made quite a little party, there being present, besides Mr. Lillyvick and Mrs. Lillyvick, not only Miss Snevellicci's mamma, but her papa also. And an uncommonly fine man Miss Snevellicci's papa was, with a hook nose, and a white forehead, and curly

black hair, and high cheek bones, and altogether quite a handsome face, only a little pimply, as though with drinking. He had a very broad chest, had Miss Snevellicci's papa, and he wore a threadbare blue dress-coat buttoned with gilt buttons tight across it; and he no sooner saw Nicholas come into the room than he whipped the two forefingers of his right hand in between the two centre buttons, and, sticking his other arm gracefully a-kimbo, seemed to say, "Now, here I am, my buck, and what have you got to say to me?"

Such was, and in such an attitude sat, Miss Snevellicci's papa, who had been in the profession ever since he had first played the ten-year-old imps in the Christmas pantomimes; who could sing a little, dance a little, fence a little, act a little, and do everything a little, but not much; who had been sometimes in the ballet, and sometimes in the chorus, at every theatre in London; who was always selected in virtue of his figure to play the military visitors and the speechless noblemen; who always wore a smart dress, and came on arm-in-arm with a smart lady in short petticoats,—and always did it, too, with such an air that people in the pit had been several times known to cry out "Bravo!" under the impression that he was somebody. Such was Miss Snevellicci's papa, upon whom some envious persons cast the imputation that he occasionally beat Miss Snevellicci's mamma, who was still a dancer, with a neat little figure and some remains of good looks; and who now sat, as she danced,—being rather too old for the full glare of the foot-lights,—in the background.

To these good people Nicholas was presented with much formality. The introduction being completed, Miss Snevellicci's papa (who was scented with rum-and-water) said that he was delighted to make the acquaintance of a gentleman so highly talented; and furthermore remarked that there hadn't been such a hit made—no, not since the first appearance of his friend Mr. Glavormelly at the Coburg.

"You have seen him, sir?" said Miss Snevellicci's papa.

"No, really I never did," replied Nicholas.

"You never saw my friend Glavormelly, sir?" said Miss Snevellicci's papa. "Then you have never seen acting yet. If he had lived——"

"Oh, he is dead, is he?" interrupted Nicholas.

"He is," said Mr. Snevellicci, "but he isn't in Westminster Abbey, more's the shame. He was a—— Well, no matter. He is gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. I hope he is appreciated *there*."

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, 14.

So saying, Miss Snevellicci's papa rubbed the tip of his nose with a very yellow silk handkerchief, and gave the company to understand that these recollections overcame him.

"Well, Mr. Lillyvick," said Nicholas, "and how are you?"

"Quite well, sir," replied the collector. "There is nothing like the married state, sir, depend upon it."

"Indeed!" said Nicholas, laughing.

"Ah! nothing like it, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick solemnly. "How do you think," whispered the collector, drawing him aside, "how do you think she looks to-night?"

"As handsome as ever," replied Nicholas, glancing at the late Miss Petowker.

"Why, there's a air about her, sir," whispered the collector, "that I never saw in anybody. Look at her now she moves to put the kettle on. There! Isn't it fascination, sir?"

"You're a lucky man," said Nicholas.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rejoined the collector. "No. Do you think I am, though, eh? Perhaps I may be, perhaps I may be. I say, I couldn't have done much better if I had been a young man, could I? You couldn't have done much better yourself, could you—eh—could you?" With such inquiries, and many more such, Mr. Lillyvick jerked his elbow into Nicholas's side, and chuckled till his face became quite purple in the attempt to keep down his satisfaction.

By this time the cloth had been laid, under the joint superintendence of all the ladies, upon two tables put together, one being high and narrow, and the other low and broad. There were oysters at the top, sausages at the bottom, a pair of snuffers in the centre, and baked potatoes wherever it was most convenient to put them. Two additional chairs were brought in from the bedroom: Miss Snevellicci sat at the head of the table, and Mr. Lillyvick at the foot; and Nicholas had not only the honour of sitting next Miss Snevellicci, but of having Miss Snevellicci's mamma on his right hand, and Miss Snevellicci's papa over the way. In short, he was the hero of the feast; and when the table was cleared, and something warm introduced, Miss Snevellicci's papa got up and proposed his health in a speech containing such affecting allusions to his coming departure, that Miss Snevellicci wept, and was compelled to retire into the bedroom.

"Hush! Don't take any notice of it," said Miss Ledrook, peeping in from the bedroom. "Say, when she comes back, that she exerts herself too much."

Miss Ledrook eked out this speech with so

many mysterious nods and frowns before she shut the door again, that a profound silence came upon all the company, during which Miss Snevellicci's papa looked very big indeed—several sizes larger than life—at everybody in turn, but particularly at Nicholas, and kept on perpetually emptying his tumbler and filling it again, until the ladies returned in a cluster, with Miss Snevellicci among them.

"You needn't alarm yourself a bit, Mr. Snevellicci," said Mrs. Lillyvick. "She is only a little weak and nervous; she has been so ever since the morning."

"Oh!" said Mr. Snevellicci, "that's all, is it?"

"Oh yes, that's all! Don't make a fuss about it," cried all the ladies together.

Now, this was not exactly the kind of reply suited to Mr. Snevellicci's importance as a man and a father, so he picked out the unfortunate Mrs. Snevellicci, and asked her what the devil she meant by talking to him in that way.

"Dear me, my dear——" said Mrs. Snevellicci.

"Don't call me your dear, ma'am," said Mr. Snevellicci, "if you please."

"Pray, pa, don't," interposed Miss Snevellicci.

"Don't what, my child?"

"Talk in that way."

"Why not?" said Mr. Snevellicci. "I hope you don't suppose there's anybody here who is to prevent my talking as I like?"

"Nobody wants to, pa," rejoined his daughter.

"Nobody would if they did want to," said Mr. Snevellicci. "I am not ashamed of myself. Snevellicci is my name; I'm to be found in Broad Court, Bow Street, when I'm in town. If I'm not at home, let any man ask for me at the stage door. Damme, they know me at the stage door, I suppose. Most men have seen my portrait at the cigar shop round the corner. I've been mentioned in the newspapers before now, haven't I? Talk! I'll tell you what; if I found out that any man had been tampering with the affections of my daughter, I wouldn't talk. I'd astonish him without talking;—that's my way."

So saying, Mr. Snevellicci struck the palm of his left hand three smart blows with his clenched fist; pulled a phantom nose with his right thumb and forefinger, and swallowed another glassful at a draught. "That's my way," repeated Mr. Snevellicci.

Most public characters have their failings; and the truth is that Mr. Snevellicci was a little addicted to drinking; or, if the whole truth must be told, that he was scarcely ever sober. He knew in his cups three distinct stages of intoxication,—the dignified—the quarrelsome—the amorous. When professionally engaged he never got beyond the dignified; in private circles he went through all three, passing from one to another with a rapidity of transition often rather perplexing to those who had not the honour of his acquaintance.

Thus Mr. Snevellicci had no sooner swallowed another glassful than he smiled upon all present in happy forgetfulness of having exhibited symptoms of pugnacity, and proposed "The ladies—bless their hearts!" in a most vivacious manner.

"I love 'em," said Mr. Snevellicci, looking round the table, "I love 'em, every one."

"Not every one," reasoned Mr. Lillyvick mildly.

"Yes, every one," repeated Mr. Snevellicci.

"That would include the married ladies, you know," said Mr. Lillyvick.

"I love them too, sir," said Mr. Snevellicci.

The collector looked into the surrounding faces with an aspect of grave astonishment, seeming to say, "This is a nice man!" and appeared a little surprised that Mrs. Lillyvick's manner yielded no evidences of horror and indignation.

"One good turn deserves another," said Mr. Snevellicci. "I love them, and they love me." And, as if this avowal were not made in sufficient disregard and defiance of all moral obligations, what did Mr. Snevellicci do? He winked—winked openly and undisguisedly; winked with his right eye—upon Henrietta Lillyvick!

The collector fell back in his chair in the intensity of his astonishment. If anybody had winked at her as Henrietta Petowker, it would have been indecorous in the last degree; but as Mrs. Lillyvick! While he thought of it in a cold perspiration, and wondered whether it was possible that he could be dreaming, Mr. Snevellicci repeated the wink, and, drinking to Mrs. Lillyvick in dumb-show, actually blew her a kiss! Mr. Lillyvick left his chair, walked straight up to the other end of the table, and fell upon him—literally fell upon him—instantaneously. Mr. Lillyvick was no light weight, and consequently, when he fell upon Mr. Snevellicci, Mr. Snevellicci fell under the table. Mr. Lillyvick followed him, and the ladies screamed.

"What is the matter with the men,—are they mad?" cried Nicholas, diving under the table, dragging up the collector by main force, and thrusting him, all doubled up, into a chair, as if he had been a stuffed figure. "What do you mean to do? what do you want to do? what is the matter with you?"

While Nicholas raised up the collector, Smike had performed the same office for Mr. Snevel-

licci, who now regarded his late adversary in tipsy amazement.

"Look here, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick, pointing to his astonished wife, "here is purity and elegance combined, whose feelings have been outraged—violated, sir!"

"Lor, what nonsense he talks!" exclaimed Mrs. Lillyvick in answer to the inquiring look of Nicholas. "Nobody has said anything to me."

"Said, Henrietta!" cried the collector. "Didn't I see him——" Mr. Lillyvick couldn't bring himself to utter the word, but he counterfeited the motion of the eye.

"Well!" cried Mrs. Lillyvick. "Do you suppose nobody is ever to look at me? A pretty thing to be married, indeed, if that was law!"

"You didn't mind it?" cried the collector.

"Mind it!" repeated Mrs. Lillyvick contemptuously. "You ought to go down on your knees and beg everybody's pardon, that you ought."

"Pardon, my dear?" said the dismayed collector.

"Yes, and mine first," replied Mrs. Lillyvick. "Do you suppose *I* ain't the best judge of what's proper and what's improper?"

"To be sure," cried all the ladies. "Do you suppose *we* shouldn't be the first to speak, if there was anything that ought to be taken notice of?"

"Do you suppose *they* don't know, sir?" said Miss Snevellicci's papa, pulling up his collar, and muttering something about a punching of heads, and being only withheld by considerations of age. With which Miss Snevellicci's papa looked steadily and sternly at Mr. Lillyvick for some seconds, and then, rising deliberately from his chair, kissed the ladies all round, beginning with Mrs. Lillyvick.

The unhappy collector looked piteously at his wife, as if to see whether there was any one trait of Miss Petowker left in Mrs. Lillyvick, and, finding too surely that there was not, begged pardon of all the company with great humility, and sat down such a crest-fallen, dispirited, disenchanted man, that, despite all his selfishness and dotage, he was quite an object of compassion.

Miss Snevellicci's papa being greatly exalted by this triumph, and incontestable proof of his popularity with the fair sex, quickly grew convivial, not to say uproarious; volunteering more than one song of no inconsiderable length, and regaling the social circle between-whiles with recollections of divers splendid women who had been supposed to entertain a passion for himself, several of whom he toasted by name, taking occasion to remark, at the same time, that if he had been a little more alive to his own interest, he might have been rolling at that moment in his chariot and four. These reminiscences appeared to awaken no very torturing pangs in the breast of Mrs. Snevellicci, who was sufficiently occupied in descanting to Nicholas upon the manifold accomplishments and merits of her daughter. Nor was the young lady herself at all behindhand in displaying her choicest allurements; but these, heightened as they were by the artifices of Miss Ledrook, had no effect whatever in increasing the attentions of Nicholas, who, with the precedent of Miss Squeers still fresh in his memory, steadily resisted every fascination, and placed so strict a guard upon his behaviour that when he had taken his leave the ladies were unanimous in pronouncing him quite a monster of insensibility.

Next day the posters appeared in due course, and the public were informed, in all the colours of the rainbow, and in letters afflicted with every possible variation of spinal deformity, how that Mr. Johnson would have the honour of making his last appearance that evening, and how that an early application for places was requested, in consequence of the extraordinary overflow attendant on his performances,—it being a remarkable fact in theatrical history, but one long since established beyond dispute, that it is a hopeless endeavour to attract people to a theatre unless they can be first brought to believe that they will never get into it.

Nicholas was somewhat at a loss, on entering the theatre at night, to account for the unusual perturbation and excitement visible in the countenances of all the company, but he was not long in doubt as to the cause, for, before he could make any inquiry respecting it, Mr. Crummles approached, and, in an agitated tone of voice, informed him that there was a London manager in the boxes.

"It's the phenomenon, depend upon it, sir," said Crummles, dragging Nicholas to the little hole in the curtain, that he might look through at the London manager. "I have not the smallest doubt it's the fame of the phenomenon—that's the man: him in the great-coat and no shirt collar. She shall have ten pound a week, Johnson; she shall not appear on the London boards for a farthing less. They shan't engage her, either, unless they engage Mrs. Crummles too—twenty pound a week for the pair; or, I'll tell you what, I'll throw in myself and the two boys, and they shall have the family

for thirty. I can't say fairer than that. They must take us all, if none of us will go without the others. That's the way some of the London people do, and it always answers. Thirty pound a week—it's too cheap, Johnson. It's dirt cheap."

Nicholas replied that it certainly was; and Mr. Vincent Crummles, taking several huge pinches of snuff to compose his feelings, hurried away to tell Mrs. Crummles that he had quite settled the only terms that could be accepted, and had resolved not to abate one single farthing.

When everybody was dressed, and the curtain went up, the excitement occasioned by the presence of the London manager increased a thousand-fold. Everybody happened to know that the London manager had come down specially to witness his or her own performance, and all were in a flutter of anxiety and expectation. Some of those who were not on in the first

"MR. SNEVELLICCI REPEATED THE WINK, AND, DRINKING TO MRS. LILLYVICK IN DUMB-SHOW, ACTUALLY BLEW HER A KISS."

scene hurried to the wings, and there stretched their necks to have a peep at him; others stole up into the two little private boxes over the stage doors, and from that position reconnoitred the London manager. Once the London manager was seen to smile—he smiled at the comic countryman's pretending to catch a blue-bottle while Mrs. Crummles was making her greatest effect. "Very good, my fine fellow," said Mr. Crummles, shaking his fist at the comic countryman when he came off, "you leave this company next Saturday night."

In the same way, everybody who was on the stage beheld no audience but one individual; everybody played to the London manager. When Mr. Lenville in a sudden burst of passion called the emperor a miscreant, and then, biting his glove, said, "But I must dissemble," instead of looking gloomily at the boards, and so waiting for his cue, as is proper in such cases, he

kept his eye fixed upon the London manager. When Miss Bravassa sang her song at her lover, who, according to custom, stood ready to shake hands with her between the verses, they looked, not at each other, but at the London manager. Mr. Crummles died point-blank at him: and, when the two guards came in to take the body off after a very hard death, it was seen to open its eyes and glance at the London manager. At length the London manager was discovered to be asleep, and shortly after that he woke up and went away, whereupon all the company fell foul of the unhappy comic countryman, declaring that his buffoonery was the sole cause; and Mr. Crummles said that he had put up with it a long time, but that he really couldn't stand it any longer, and therefore would feel obliged by his looking out for another engagement.

All this was the occasion of much amusement to Nicholas, whose only feeling upon the subject was one of sincere satisfaction that the great man went away before he appeared. He went through his part in the two last pieces as briskly as he could, and, having been received with unbounded favour and unprecedented applause—so said the bills for next day, which had been printed an hour or two before—he took Smike's arm, and walked home to bed.

With the post next morning came a letter from Newman Noggs, very inky, very short, very dirty, very small, and very mysterious, urging Nicholas to return to London instantly; not to lose an instant; to be there that night if possible.

"I will," said Nicholas. "Heaven knows I have remained here for the best, and sorely against my own will; but even now I may have dallied too long. What can have happened? Smike, my good fellow, here—take my purse. Put our things together, and pay what little debts we owe—quick, and we shall be in time for the morning coach. I will only tell them that we are going, and will return to you immediately."

So saying, he took his hat, and, hurrying away to the lodgings of Mr. Crummles, applied his hand to the knocker with such hearty good-will, that he awakened that gentleman, who was still in bed, and caused Mr. Bulph the pilot to take his morning's pipe very nearly out of his mouth in the extremity of his surprise.

The door being opened, Nicholas ran up-stairs without any ceremony, and, bursting into the darkened sitting-room on the one-pair front, found that the two Master Crummleses had sprung out of the sofa-bedstead, and were putting on their clothes with great rapidity, under the impression that it was the middle of the night, and the next house was on fire.

Before he could undeceive them, Mr. Crummles came down in a flannel gown and night-cap; and to him Nicholas briefly explained that circumstances had occurred which rendered it necessary for him to repair to London immediately.

"So good-bye," said Nicholas; "good-bye, good-bye!"

He was half-way down-stairs before Mr. Crummles had sufficiently recovered his surprise to gasp out something about the posters.

"I can't help it," replied Nicholas. "Set whatever I may have earned this week against them, or, if that will not repay you, say at once what will. Quick, quick!"

"We'll cry quits about that," returned Crummles. "But can't we have one last night more?"

"Not an hour—not a minute," replied Nicholas impatiently.

"Won't you stop to say something to Mrs. Crummles?" asked the manager, following him down to the door.

"I couldn't stop if it were to prolong my life a score of years," rejoined Nicholas. "Here, take my hand, and with it my hearty thanks.—Oh! that I should have been fooling here!"

Accompanying these words with an impatient stamp upon the ground, he tore himself from the manager's detaining grasp, and, darting rapidly down the street, was out of sight in an instant.

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Crummles, looking wistfully towards the point at which he had just disappeared; "if he only acted like that, what a deal of money he'd draw! He should have kept upon this circuit; he'd have been very useful to me. But he don't know what's good for him. He is an impetuous youth. Young men are rash, very rash."

Mr. Crummles, being in a moralising mood, might possibly have moralised for some minutes longer if he had not mechanically put his hand towards his waistcoat pocket, where he was accustomed to keep his snuff. The absence of any pocket at all in the usual direction, suddenly recalled to his recollection the fact that he had no waistcoat on; and this leading him to a contemplation of the extreme scantiness of his attire, he shut the door abruptly, and retired up-stairs with great precipitation.

Smike had made good speed while Nicholas was absent, and with his help everything was soon ready for their departure. They scarcely stopped to take a morsel of breakfast, and in

less than half an hour arrived at the coach-office: quite out of breath with the haste they had made to reach it in time. There were yet a few minutes to spare, so, having secured the places, Nicholas hurried into a slop-seller's hard by, and bought Smike a great-coat. It would have been rather large for a substantial yeoman, but the shopman averring (and with considerable truth) that it was a most uncommon fit, Nicholas would have purchased it, in his impatience, if it had been twice the size.

As they hurried up to the coach, which was now in the open street and all ready for starting, Nicholas was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a close and violent embrace, which nearly took him off his legs; nor was his amazement at all lessened by hearing the voice of Mr. Crummles exclaim, "It is he—my friend, my friend!"

"Bless my heart!" cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager's arms, "what are you about?"

The manager made no reply, but strained him to his breast again, exclaiming, as he did so, "Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!"

In fact, Mr. Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas; and, to render it the more imposing, he was now, to that young gentleman's most profound annoyance, inflicting upon him a rapid succession of stage embraces, which, as everybody knows, are performed by the embracer's laying his or her chin on the shoulder of the object of affection, and looking over it. This Mr. Crummles did in the highest style of melodrama, pouring forth, at the same time, all the most dismal forms of farewell he could think of out of the stock pieces. Nor was this all, for the elder Master Crummles was going through a similar ceremony with Smike; while Master Percy Crummles, with a very little second-hand camlet cloak, worn theatrically over his left shoulder, stood by, in the attitude of an attendant officer, waiting to convey the two victims to the scaffold.

The lookers-on laughed very heartily, and, as it was as well to put a good face upon the matter, Nicholas laughed too when he had succeeded in disengaging himself; and, rescuing the astonished Smike, climbed up to the coach roof after him, and kissed his hand in honour of the absent Mrs. Crummles as they rolled away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF RALPH NICKLEBY AND NEWMAN NOGGS, AND SOME WISE PRECAUTIONS, THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF WHICH WILL APPEAR IN THE SEQUEL.

IN blissful unconsciousness that his nephew was hastening at the utmost speed of four good horses towards his sphere of action, and that every passing minute diminished the distance between them, Ralph Nickleby sat that morning occupied in his customary avocations, and yet unable to prevent his thoughts wandering from time to time back to the interview which had taken place between himself and his niece on the previous day. At such intervals, after a few moments of abstraction, Ralph would mutter some peevish interjection, and apply himself with renewed steadiness of purpose to the ledger before him, but again and again the same train of thought came back despite all his efforts to prevent it, confusing him in his calculations, and utterly distracting his attention from the figures over which he bent. At length Ralph laid down his pen, and threw himself back in his chair, as though he had made up his mind to allow the obtrusive current of reflection to take its own course, and, by giving it full scope, to rid himself of it effectually.

"I am not a man to be moved by a pretty face," muttered Ralph sternly. "There is a grinning skull beneath it, and men like me, who look and work below the surface, see that, and not its delicate covering. And yet I almost like the girl, or should if she had been less proudly and squeamishly brought up. If the boy were drowned or hanged, and the mother dead, this house should be her home. I wish they were, with all my soul."

Notwithstanding the deadly hatred which Ralph felt towards Nicholas, and the bitter contempt with which he sneered at poor Mrs. Nickleby—notwithstanding the baseness with which he had behaved, and was then behaving, and would behave again if his interest prompted him, towards Kate herself—still there was, strange though it may seem, something humanising and even gentle in his thoughts at that moment. He thought of what his home might be if Kate were there; he placed her in the empty chair, looked upon her, heard her speak; he felt again upon his arm the gentle pressure of the trembling hand; he strewed his costly rooms with the hundred silent tokens of feminine presence and occupation; he came back again

to the cold fireside and the silent dreary splendour; and in that one glimpse of a better nature, born as it was in selfish thoughts, the rich man felt himself friendless, childless, and alone. Gold, for the instant, lost its lustre in his eyes, for there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase.

A very slight circumstance was sufficient to banish such reflections from the mind of such a man. As Ralph looked vacantly out across the yard towards the window of the other office, he became suddenly aware of the earnest observation of Newman Noggs, who, with his red nose almost touching the glass, feigned to be mending a pen with a rusty fragment of a knife, but was in reality staring at his employer with a countenance of the closest and most eager scrutiny.

Ralph exchanged his dreamy posture for his accustomed business attitude: the face of Newman disappeared, and the train of thought took to flight, all simultaneously, and in an instant.

After a few minutes Ralph rang his bell. Newman answered the summons, and Ralph raised his eyes stealthily to his face, as if he almost feared to read there a knowledge of his recent thoughts.

There was not the smallest speculation, however, in the countenance of Newman Noggs. If it be possible to imagine a man, with two eyes in his head, and both wide open, looking in no direction whatever, and seeing nothing, Newman appeared to be that man while Ralph Nickleby regarded him.

"How now?" growled Ralph.

"Oh!" said Newman, throwing some intelligence into his eyes all at once, and dropping them on his master, "I thought you rang." With which laconic remark Newman turned round and hobbled away.

"Stop!" said Ralph.

Newman stopped; not at all disconcerted.

"I did ring."

"I knew you did."

"Then why do you offer to go if you know that?"

"I thought you rang to say you didn't ring," replied Newman. "You often do."

"How dare you pry, and peer, and stare at me, sirrah?" demanded Ralph.

"Stare!" cried Newman, "at *you!* Ha, ha!" which was all the explanation Newman deigned to offer.

"Be careful, sir," said Ralph, looking steadily at him. "Let me have no drunken fooling here. Do you see this parcel?"

"It's big enough," rejoined Newman.

"Carry it into the City; to Cross, in Broad Street, and leave it there—quick. Do you hear?"

Newman gave a dogged kind of nod to express an affirmative reply, and, leaving the room for a few seconds, returned with his hat. Having made various ineffective attempts to fit the parcel (which was some two feet square) into the crown thereof, Newman took it under his arm, and after putting on his fingerless gloves with great precision and nicety, keeping his eyes fixed upon Mr. Ralph Nickleby all the time, he adjusted his hat upon his head with as much care, real or pretended, as if it were a bran-new one of the most expensive quality, and at last departed on his errand.

He executed his commission with great promptitude and dispatch, only calling at one public-house for half a minute, and even that might be said to be in his way, for he went in at one door and came out at the other; but as he returned, and had got so far homewards as the Strand, Newman began to loiter with the uncertain air of a man who has not quite made up his mind whether to halt or go straight forwards. After a very short consideration, the former inclination prevailed, and, making towards the point he had had in his mind, Newman knocked a modest double knock, or rather a nervous single one, at Miss La Creevy's door.

It was opened by a strange servant, on whom the odd figure of the visitor did not appear to make the most favourable impression possible, inasmuch as she no sooner saw him than she very nearly closed it, and, placing herself in the narrow gap, inquired what he wanted. But Newman, merely uttering the monosyllable "Noggs," as if it were some cabalistic word, at sound of which bolts would fly back and doors open, pushed briskly past, and gained the door of Miss La Creevy's sitting-room, before the astonished servant could offer any opposition.

"Walk in if you please," said Miss La Creevy in reply to the sound of Newman's knuckles; and in he walked accordingly.

"Bless us!" cried Miss La Creevy, starting as Newman bolted in; "what did you want, sir?"

"You have forgotten me," said Newman with an inclination of the head. "I wonder at that. That nobody should remember me who knew me in other days is natural enough; but there are few people who, seeing me once, forget me *now*." He glanced, as he spoke, at his shabby clothes and paralytic limb, and slightly shook his head.

"I did forget you, I declare," said Miss La

Creevy, rising to receive Newman, who met her half-way, "and I am ashamed of myself for doing so; for you are a kind, good creature, Mr. Noggs. Sit down, and tell me all about Miss Nickleby. Poor dear thing! I haven't seen her for this many a week."

"How's that?" asked Newman.

"Why, the truth is, Mr. Noggs," said Miss La Creevy, "that I have been out on a visit—the first visit I have made for fifteen years."

"That is a long time," said Newman sadly.

"So it is a very long time to look back upon in years, though, somehow or other, thank Heaven, the solitary days roll away peacefully and happily enough," replied the miniature painter. "I have a brother, Mr. Noggs—the only relation I have—and all that time I never saw him once. Not that we ever quarrelled, but he was apprenticed down in the country, and he got married there, and new ties and affections springing up about him, he forgot a poor little woman like me, as it was very reasonable he should, you know. Don't suppose that I complain about that, because I always said to myself, 'It is very natural; poor dear John is making his way in the world, and has a wife to tell his cares and troubles to, and children now to play about him, so God bless him and them, and send we may all meet together one day where we shall part no more.' But what do you think, Mr. Noggs," said the miniature painter, brightening up and clapping her hands, "of that very same brother coming up to London at last, and never resting till he found me out; what do you think of his coming here, and sitting down in that very chair, and crying like a child because he was so glad to see me; what do you think of his insisting on taking me down all the way into the country to his own house (quite a sumptuous place, Mr. Noggs, with a large garden, and I don't know how many fields, and a man in livery waiting at table, and cows and horses and pigs, and I don't know what besides), and making me stay a whole month, and pressing me to stop there all my life—yes, all my life—and so did his wife, and so did the children—and there were four of them, and one, the eldest girl of all, they—they had named her after me eight good years before, they had indeed? I never was so happy; in all my life I never was!" The worthy soul hid her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud; for it was the first opportunity she had had of unburdening her heart, and it would have its way.

"But bless my life," said Miss La Creevy, wiping her eyes after a short pause, and cramming her handkerchief into her pocket with great bustle and dispatch; "what a foolish creature I must seem to you, Mr. Noggs! I shouldn't have said anything about it, only I wanted to explain to you how it was I hadn't seen Miss Nickleby."

"Have you seen the old lady?" asked Newman.

"You mean Mrs. Nickleby?" said Miss La Creevy. "Then I tell you what, Mr. Noggs, if you want to keep in the good books in that quarter, you had better not call her the old lady any more, for I suspect she wouldn't be best pleased to hear you. Yes, I went there the night before last, but she was quite on the high ropes about something, and was so grand and mysterious, that I couldn't make anything of her: so, to tell you the truth, I took it into my head to be grand too, and came away in state. I thought she would have come round again before this, but she hasn't been here."

"About Miss Nickleby——" said Newman.

"Why, she was here twice while I was away," returned Miss La Creevy. "I was afraid she mightn't like to have me calling on her among those great folks in What's-its-name Place, so I thought I'd wait a day or two, and, if I didn't see her, write."

"Ah!" exclaimed Newman, cracking his fingers.

"However, I want to hear all the news about them from you," said Miss La Creevy. "How is the old rough and tough monster of Golden Square? Well, of course; such people always are. I don't mean how is he in health, but how is he going on: how is he behaving himself?"

"Damn him!" cried Newman, dashing his cherished hat on the floor; "like a false hound!"

"Gracious, Mr. Noggs, you quite terrify me!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy, turning pale.

"I should have spoilt his features yesterday afternoon if I could have afforded it," said Newman, moving restlessly about, and shaking his fist at a portrait of Mr. Canning over the mantelpiece. "I was very near it. I was obliged to put my hands in my pockets, and keep 'em there very tight. I shall do it some day in that little back-parlour, I know I shall. I should have done it before now, if I hadn't been afraid of making bad worse. I shall double lock myself in with him and have it out before I die, I'm quite certain of it."

"I shall scream if you don't compose yourself, Mr. Noggs," said Miss La Creevy; "I'm sure I shan't be able to help it."

"Never mind," rejoined Newman, darting violently to and fro. "He's coming up to-

night: I wrote to tell him. He little thinks I know; he little thinks I care. Cunning scoundrel! he don't think that. Not he, not he. Never mind, I'll thwart him—*I*, Newman Noggs! Ho, ho, the rascal!"

Lashing himself up to an extravagant pitch of fury, Newman Noggs jerked himself about the room with the most eccentric motion ever beheld in a human being: now sparring at the little miniatures on the wall, and now giving himself violent thumps on the head, as if to heighten the delusion, until he sank down in his former seat quite breathless and exhausted.

"There!" said Newman, picking up his hat; "that's done me good. Now I'm better, and I'll tell you all about it."

It took some little time to reassure Miss La Creevy, who had been almost frightened out of her senses by this remarkable demonstration; but, that done, Newman faithfully related all that had passed in the interview between Kate and her uncle, prefacing his narrative with a statement of his previous suspicions on the sub

"LASHING HIMSELF UP TO AN EXTRAVAGANT PITCH OF FURY, NEWMAN NOGGS JERKED HIMSELF ABOUT THE ROOM WITH THE MOST ECCENTRIC MOTION EVER BEHELD IN A HUMAN BEING."

ject, and his reasons for forming them; and concluding with a communication of the step he had taken in secretly writing to Nicholas.

Though little Miss La Creevy's indignation was not so singularly displayed as Newman's, it was scarcely inferior in violence and intensity. Indeed, if Ralph Nickleby had happened to make his appearance in the room at that moment, there is some doubt whether he would not have found Miss La Creevy a more dangerous opponent than even Newman Noggs himself.

"God forgive me for saying so," said Miss La Creevy as a wind-up to all her expressions of anger, "but I really feel as if I could stick this into him with pleasure."

It was not a very awful weapon that Miss La Creevy held, it being, in fact, nothing more nor less than a black-lead pencil; but, discovering her mistake, the little portrait painter exchanged it for a mother-of-pearl fruit knife, wherewith, in proof of her desperate thoughts, she made a lunge as she spoke, which would have scarcely disturbed the crumb of a half-quartern loaf.

"She won't stop where she is after to-night," said Newman. "That's a comfort."

"Stop!" cried Miss La Creevy, "she should have left there weeks ago."

"—If we had known of this," rejoined Newman. "But we didn't. Nobody could properly interfere but her mother or brother. The mother's weak—poor thing—weak. The dear young man will be here to-night."

"Heart alive!" cried Miss La Creevy. "He will do something desperate, Mr. Noggs, if you tell him all at once."

Newman left off rubbing his hands, and assumed a thoughtful look.

"Depend upon it," said Miss La Creevy earnestly, "if you are not very careful in breaking out the truth to him, he will do some violence upon his uncle or one of these men that will bring some terrible calamity upon his own head, and grief and sorrow to us all."

"I never thought of that," rejoined Newman, his countenance falling more and more. "I came to ask you to receive his sister in case he brought her here, but——"

"But this is a matter of much greater importance," interrupted Miss La Creevy; "that you might have been sure of before you came, but the end of this nobody can foresee, unless you are very guarded and careful."

"What *can* I do?" cried Newman, scratching his head with an air of great vexation and perplexity. "If he was to talk of pistoling 'em all, I should be obliged to say, 'Certainly—serve 'em right.'"

Miss La Creevy could not suppress a small shriek on hearing this, and instantly set about extorting a solemn pledge from Newman that he would use his utmost endeavours to pacify the wrath of Nicholas; which, after some demur, was conceded. They then consulted together on the safest and surest mode of communicating to him the circumstances which had rendered his presence necessary.

"He must have time to cool before he can possibly do anything," said Miss La Creevy. "That is of the greatest consequence. He must not be told until late at night."

"But he'll be in town between six and seven this evening," replied Newman. "*I* can't keep it from him when he asks me."

"Then you must go out, Mr. Noggs," said Miss La Creevy. "You can easily have been kept away by business, and must not return till nearly midnight."

"Then he will come straight here," retorted Newman.

"So I suppose," observed Miss La Creevy; "but he won't find me at home, for I'll go straight to the City the instant you leave me, make up matters with Mrs. Nickleby, and take her away to the theatre, so that he may not even know where his sister lives."

Upon further discussion, this appeared the safest and most feasible mode of proceeding that could possibly be adopted. Therefore it was finally determined that matters should be so arranged, and Newman, after listening to many supplementary cautions and entreaties, took his leave of Miss La Creevy, and trudged back to Golden Square; ruminating as he went upon a vast number of possibilities and impossibilities which crowded upon his brain, and arose out of the conversation that had just terminated.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RELATING CHIEFLY TO SOME REMARKABLE CONVERSATION, AND SOME REMARKABLE PROCEEDINGS TO WHICH IT GIVES RISE.

LONDON at last!" cried Nicholas, throwing back his great-coat and rousing Smike from a long nap. "It seemed to me as though we should never reach it."

"And yet you came along at a tidy pace too," observed the coachman, looking over his shoulder at Nicholas with no very pleasant expression of countenance.

"Ay, I know that," was the reply; "but I have been very anxious to be at my journey's end, and that makes the way seem long."

"Well," remarked the coachman, "if the way seemed long with such cattle as you've sat behind, you *must* have been most uncommon anxious;" and, so saying, he let out his whiplash and touched up a little boy on the calves of his legs by way of emphasis.

They rattled on through the noisy, bustling, crowded streets of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists' glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of the shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous articles of luxurious ornament, succeeded each other in rich and glittering profusion. Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd, and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in

one moving mass, like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.

As they dashed by the quickly-changing and ever-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite, and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, and churchyards for the buried—all these, jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Nor were there wanting objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene. The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures, pale and pinched-up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food, hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass—an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's, and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand-in-hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together.

But it was London; and the old country lady inside, who had put her head out of the coach window a mile or two this side Kingston, and cried out to the driver that she was sure he must have passed it, and forgotten to set her down, was satisfied at last.

Nicholas engaged beds for himself and Smike at the inn where the coach stopped, and repaired, without the delay of another moment, to the lodgings of Newman Noggs; for his anxiety and impatience had increased with every succeeding minute, and were almost beyond control.

There was a fire in Newman's garret, and a candle had been left burning; the floor was cleanly swept, the room was as comfortably arranged as such a room could be, and meat and drink were placed in order upon the table. Everything bespoke the affectionate care and attention of Newman Noggs, but Newman himself was not there.

"Do you know what time he will be home?" inquired Nicholas, tapping at the door of Newman's front neighbour.

"Ah, Mr. Johnson!" said Crowl, presenting himself. "Welcome, sir. How well you're looking! I never could have believed——"

"Pardon me," interposed Nicholas. "My question—I am extremely anxious to know."

"Why, he has a troublesome affair of business," replied Crowl, "and will not be home before twelve o'clock. He was very unwilling to go, I can tell you, but there was no help for it. However, he left word that you were to make yourself comfortable till he came back, and that I was to entertain you, which I shall be very glad to do."

In proof of his extreme readiness to exert himself for the general entertainment, Mr. Crowl drew a chair to the table as he spoke, and, helping himself plentifully to the cold meat, invited Nicholas and Smike to follow his example.

Disappointed and uneasy, Nicholas could touch no food, so, after he had seen Smike comfortably established at the table, he walked out (despite a great many dissuasions uttered by Mr. Crowl with his mouth full), and left Smike to detain Newman in case he returned first.

As Miss La Creevy had anticipated, Nicholas betook himself straight to her house. Finding her from home, he debated within himself for some time whether he should go to his mother's residence, and so compromise her with Ralph Nickleby. Fully persuaded, however, that Newman would not have solicited him to return unless there was some strong reason which required his presence at home, he resolved to go there, and hastened eastwards with all speed.

Mrs. Nickleby would not be at home, the girl said, until past twelve, or later. She believed Miss Nickleby was well, but she didn't live at home now, nor did she come home except very seldom. She couldn't say where she was stopping, but it was not at Madame Mantalini's—she was sure of that.

With his heart beating violently, and apprehending he knew not what disaster, Nicholas returned to where he had left Smike. Newman had not been home. He wouldn't be till twelve o'clock; there was no chance of it. Was there no possibility of sending to fetch him, if it were only for an instant, or forwarding to him one line of writing to which he might return a verbal reply? That was quite impracticable. He was

not at Golden Square, and probably had been sent to execute some commission at a distance.

Nicholas tried to remain quietly where he was, but he felt so nervous and excited that he could not sit still. He seemed to be losing time unless he was moving. It was an absurd fancy, he knew, but he was wholly unable to resist it. So, he took up his hat, and rambled out again.

He strolled westward this time, pacing the long streets with hurried footsteps, and agitated by a thousand misgivings and apprehensions which he could not overcome. He passed into Hyde Park, now silent and deserted, and increased his rate of walking, as if in the hope of leaving his thoughts behind. They crowded upon him more thickly, however, now there were no passing objects to attract his attention; and the one idea was always uppermost, that some stroke of ill-fortune must have occurred so calamitous in its nature that all were fearful of disclosing it to him. The old question arose again and again—What could it be? Nicholas walked till he was weary, but was not one bit the wiser; and, indeed, he came out of the Park at last, a great deal more confused and perplexed than when he went in.

He had taken scarcely anything to eat or drink since early in the morning, and felt quite worn out and exhausted. As he returned languidly towards the point from which he had started, along one of the thoroughfares which lie between Park Lane and Bond Street, he passed a handsome hotel, before which he stopped mechanically.

"An expensive place, I dare say," thought Nicholas; "but a pint of wine and a biscuit are no great debauch, wherever they are had. And yet I don't know."

He walked on a few steps, but, looking wistfully down the long vista of gas-lamps before him, and thinking how long it would take to reach the end of it—and being, besides, in that kind of mood in which a man is most disposed to yield to his first impulse—and being, besides, strongly attracted to the hotel, in part by curiosity, and in part by some odd mixture of feelings which he would have been troubled to define—Nicholas turned back again, and walked into the coffee-room.

It was very handsomely furnished. The walls were ornamented with the choicest specimens of French paper, enriched with a gilded cornice of elegant design. The floor was covered with a rich carpet; and two superb mirrors, one above the chimney-piece, and one at the opposite end of the room reaching from floor to ceiling, multiplied the other beauties, and added new ones of their own to enhance the general effect. There was a rather noisy party of four gentlemen in a box by the fire-place, and only two other persons present—both elderly gentlemen, and both alone.

Observing all this in the first comprehensive glance with which a stranger surveys a place that is new to him, Nicholas sat himself down in the box next to the noisy party, with his back towards them, and, postponing his order for a pint of claret until such time as the waiter and one of the elderly gentlemen should have settled a disputed question relative to the price of an item in the bill of fare, took up a newspaper, and began to read.

He had not read twenty lines, and was, in truth, half dozing, when he was startled by the mention of his sister's name. "Little Kate Nickleby" were the words that caught his ear. He raised his head in amazement, and, as he did so, saw, by the reflection in the opposite glass, that two of the party behind him had risen, and were standing before the fire. "It must have come from one of them," thought Nicholas. He waited to hear more with a countenance of some indignation, for the tone of speech had been anything but respectful, and the appearance of the individual whom he presumed to have been the speaker was coarse and swaggering.

This person—so Nicholas observed in the same glance at the mirror which had enabled him to see his face—was standing with his back to the fire, conversing with a younger man, who stood with his back to the company, wore his hat, and was adjusting his shirt collar by the aid of the glass. They spoke in whispers, now and then bursting into a loud laugh, but Nicholas could catch no repetition of the words, nor anything sounding at all like the words, which had attracted his attention.

At length the two resumed their seats, and more wine being ordered, the party grew louder in their mirth. Still there was no reference made to anybody with whom he was acquainted, and Nicholas became persuaded that his excited fancy had either imagined the sounds altogether, or converted some other words into the name which had been so much in his thoughts.

"It is remarkable, too," thought Nicholas: "if it had been 'Kate,' or 'Kate Nickleby,' I should not have been so much surprised: but 'little Kate Nickleby!'"

The wine coming at the moment prevented his finishing the sentence. He swallowed a glassful, and took up the paper again. At that instant——

"Little Kate Nickleby!" cried the voice behind him.

"I was right," muttered Nicholas as the paper fell from his hand. "And it was the man I supposed."

"As there was a proper objection to drinking her in heel-taps," said the voice, "we'll give her the first glass in the new magnum. Little Kate Nickleby!"

"Little Kate Nickleby!" cried the other three. And the glasses were set down empty.

Keenly alive to the tone and manner of this slight and careless mention of his sister's name in a public place, Nicholas fired at once; but he kept himself quiet by a great effort, and did not even turn his head.

"The jade!" said the same voice which had spoken before. "She's a true Nickleby—a worthy imitator of her old uncle Ralph—she hangs back to be more sought after—so does he; nothing to be got out of Ralph unless you follow him up, and then the money comes doubly welcome, and the bargain doubly hard, for you're impatient, and he isn't. Oh! infernal cunning."

"Infernal cunning," echoed two voices.

Nicholas was in a perfect agony as the two elderly gentlemen opposite rose one after the other, and went away, lest they should be the means of his losing one word of what was said. But the conversation was suspended as they withdrew, and resumed with even greater freedom when they had left the room.

"I am afraid," said the younger gentleman, "that the old woman has grown jea-a-lous, and locked her up. Upon my soul it looks like it."

"If they quarrel, and little Nickleby goes home to her mother, so much the better," said the first. "I can do anything with the old lady. She'll believe anything I tell her."

"Egad, that's true," returned the other voice. "Ha, ha, ha! Poor deyvle!"

The laugh was taken up by the two voices which always came in together, and became general at Mrs. Nickleby's expense. Nicholas turned burning hot with rage, but he commanded himself for the moment, and waited to hear more.

What he heard need not be repeated here. Suffice it that, as the wine went round, he heard enough to acquaint him with the characters and designs of those whose conversation he overheard; to possess him with the full extent of Ralph's villainy, and the real reason of his own presence being required in London. He heard all this, and more. He heard his sister's sufferings derided, and her virtuous conduct jeered at and brutally misconstrued; he heard her name bandied from mouth to mouth, and herself made the subject of coarse and insolent wagers, free speech, and licentious jesting.

The man who had spoken first, led the conversation, and, indeed, almost engrossed it, being only stimulated from time to time by some slight observation from one or other of his companions. To him, then, Nicholas addressed himself when he was sufficiently composed to stand before the party, and force the words from his parched and scorching throat.

"Let me have a word with you, sir," said Nicholas.

"With me, sir?" retorted Sir Mulberry Hawk, eyeing him in disdainful surprise.

"I said with you," replied Nicholas, speaking with great difficulty, for his passion choked him.

"A mysterious stranger, upon my soul!" exclaimed Sir Mulberry, raising his wine-glass to his lips, and looking round upon his friends.

"Will you step apart with me for a few minutes, or do you refuse?" said Nicholas sternly.

Sir Mulberry merely paused in the act of drinking, and bade him either name his business or leave the table.

Nicholas drew a card from his pocket, and threw it before him.

"There, sir," said Nicholas; "my business you will guess."

A momentary expression of astonishment, not unmixed with some confusion, appeared in the face of Sir Mulberry as he read the name; but he subdued it in an instant, and tossing the card to Lord Verisopht, who sat opposite, drew a toothpick from a glass before him, and very leisurely applied it to his mouth.

"Your name and address?" said Nicholas, turning paler as his passion kindled.

"I shall give you neither," replied Sir Mulberry.

"If there is a gentleman in this party," said Nicholas, looking round, and scarcely able to make his white lips form the words, "he will acquaint me with the name and residence of this man."

There was a dead silence.

"I am the brother of the young lady who has been the subject of conversation here," said Nicholas. "I denounce this person as a liar, and impeach him as a coward. If he has a friend here, he will save him the disgrace of the paltry attempt to conceal his name—an utterly useless one—for I will find it out, nor leave him until I have."

Sir Mulberry looked at him contemptuously, and, addressing his companions, said:

"Let the fellow talk, I have nothing serious to say to boys of his station; and his pretty sister shall save him a broken head, if he talks till midnight."

"You are a base and spiritless scoundrel!" said Nicholas, "and shall be proclaimed so to the world. I *will* know you; I will follow you home if you walk the streets till morning."

Sir Mulberry's hand involuntarily closed upon the decanter, and he seemed for an instant about to launch it at the head of his challenger. But he only filled his glass, and laughed in derision.

Nicholas sat himself down directly opposite to the party, and, summoning the waiter, paid his bill.

"Do you know that person's name?" he inquired of the man in an audible voice; pointing out Sir Mulberry as he put the question.

Sir Mulberry laughed again, and the two voices which had always spoken together echoed the laugh; but rather feebly.

"That gentleman, sir?" replied the waiter, who, no doubt, knew his cue, and answered with just as little respect, and just as much impertinence, as he could safely show. "No, sir, I do not, sir."

"Here, you sir," cried Sir Mulberry as the man was retiring; "do you know *that* person's name?"

"Name, sir? No, sir."

"Then you'll find it there," said Sir Mulberry, throwing Nicholas's card towards him; "and, when you have made yourself master of it, put that piece of pasteboard in the fire—do you hear me?"

The man grinned, and, looking doubtfully at Nicholas, compromised the matter by sticking the card in the chimney-glass. Having done this, he retired.

Nicholas folded his arms, and, biting his lip, sat perfectly quiet; sufficiently expressing by his manner, however, a firm determination to carry his threat of following Sir Mulberry home into steady execution.

It was evident, from the tone in which the younger member of the party appeared to remonstrate with his friend, that he objected to this course of proceeding, and urged him to comply with the request which Nicholas had made. Sir Mulberry, however, who was not quite sober, and who was in a sullen and dogged state of obstinacy, soon silenced the representations of his weak young friend, and further seemed—as if to save himself from a repetition of them—to insist on being left alone. However this might have been, the young gentleman, and the two who had always spoken together, actually rose to go after a short interval, and presently retired, leaving their friend alone with Nicholas.

It will be very readily supposed that, to one in the condition of Nicholas, the minutes appeared to move with leaden wings indeed, and that their progress did not seem the more rapid from the monotonous ticking of a French clock, or the shrill sound of its little bell which told the quarters. But there he sat; and in his old seat on the opposite side of the room reclined Sir Mulberry Hawk, with his legs upon the cushion, and his handkerchief thrown negligently over his knees: finishing his magnum of claret with the utmost coolness and indifference.

Thus they remained in perfect silence for upwards of an hour—Nicholas would have thought for three hours at least, but that the little bell had only gone four times. Twice or thrice he looked angrily and impatiently round; but there was Sir Mulberry in the same attitude, putting his glass to his lips from time to time, and looking vacantly at the wall, as if he were wholly ignorant of the presence of any living person.

At length he yawned, stretched himself, and rose; walked coolly to the glass, and, having surveyed himself therein, turned round, and honoured Nicholas with a long and contemptuous stare. Nicholas stared again with right good will; Sir Mulberry shrugged his shoulders, smiled slightly, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to help him on with his great-coat.

The man did so, and held the door open.

"Don't wait," said Sir Mulberry; and they were alone again.

Sir Mulberry took several turns up and down the room, whistling carelessly all the time; stopped to finish the last glass of claret which he had poured out a few minutes before, walked again, put on his hat, adjusted it by the glass, drew on his gloves, and, at last, walked slowly out. Nicholas, who had been fuming and chafing until he was nearly wild, darted from his seat, and followed him—so closely that, before the door had swung upon its hinges after Sir Mulberry's passing out, they stood side by side in the street together.

There was a private cabriolet in waiting; the groom opened the apron, and jumped out to the horse's head.

"Will you make yourself known to me?" asked Nicholas in a suppressed voice.

"No," replied the other fiercely, and confirming the refusal with an oath. "No."

"If you trust to your horse's speed, you will

"SIR MULBERRY, SHORTENING HIS WHIP, APPLIED IT FURIOUSLY TO THE HEAD AND SHOULDERS OF NICHOLAS. IT WAS BROKEN IN THE STRUGGLE; NICHOLAS GAINED THE HEAVY HANDLE, AND WITH IT LAID OPEN ONE SIDE OF HIS ANTAGONIST'S FACE FROM THE EYE TO THE LIP."—P. 211.

find yourself mistaken," said Nicholas. "I will accompany you. By Heaven I will, if I hang on to the foot-board!"

"You shall be horsewhipped if you do," returned Sir Mulberry.

"You are a villain," said Nicholas.

"You are an errand-boy for aught I know," said Sir Mulberry Hawk.

"I am the son of a country gentleman," returned Nicholas, "your equal in birth and education, and your superior, I trust, in everything besides. I tell you again, Miss Nickleby is my sister. Will you or will you not answer for your unmanly and brutal conduct?"

"To a proper champion—yes. To you—no," returned Sir Mulberry, taking the reins in his hand. "Stand out of the way, dog! William, let go her head."

"You had better not," cried Nicholas, springing on the step as Sir Mulberry jumped in, and catching at the reins. "He has no command over the horse, mind. You shall not go—you shall not, I swear—till you have told me who you are."

The groom hesitated, for the mare, who was a high-spirited animal and thorough-bred, plunged so violently that he could scarcely hold her.

"Leave go, I tell you!" thundered his master.

The man obeyed. The animal reared and plunged as though it would dash the carriage into a thousand pieces, but Nicholas, blind to all sense of danger, and conscious of nothing but his fury, still maintained his place and his hold upon the reins.

"Will you unclasp your hand?"

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"No!"

"No!"

In less time than the quickest tongue could tell it, these words were exchanged, and Sir Mulberry, shortening his whip, applied it furiously to the head and shoulders of Nicholas. It was broken in the struggle; Nicholas gained the heavy handle, and with it laid open one side of his antagonist's face from the eye to the lip. He saw the gash; knew that the mare had darted off at a wild mad gallop; a hundred lights danced in his eyes, and he felt himself flung violently upon the ground.

He was giddy and sick, but staggered to his feet directly, roused by the loud shouts of the men who were tearing up the street, and screaming to those ahead to clear the way. He was conscious of a torrent of people rushing quickly by—looking up, could discern the cabriolet whirled along the foot-pavement with frightful rapidity—then heard a loud cry, the smashing of some heavy body, and the breaking of glass—and then the crowd closed in in the distance, and he could see or hear no more.

The general attention had been entirely directed from himself to the person in the carriage, and he was quite alone. Rightly judging that under such circumstances it would be madness to follow, he turned down a by-street in search of the nearest coach-stand, finding after a minute or two that he was reeling like a drunken man, and aware for the first time of a stream of blood that was trickling down his face and breast.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH MR. RALPH NICKLEBY IS RELIEVED, BY A VERY EXPEDITIOUS PROCESS, FROM ALL COMMERCE WITH HIS RELATIONS.

SMIKE and Newman Noggs, who in his impatience had returned home long before the time agreed upon, sat before the fire, listening anxiously to every footstep on the stairs, and the slightest sound that stirred within the house, for the approach of Nicholas. Time had worn on, and it was growing late. He had promised to be back in an hour; and his prolonged absence began to excite considerable alarm in the minds of both, as was abundantly testified by the blank looks they cast upon each other at every new disappointment.

At length a coach was heard to stop, and Newman ran out to light Nicholas up the stairs. Beholding him in the trim described at the conclusion of the last chapter, he stood aghast in wonder and consternation.

"Don't be alarmed," said Nicholas, hurrying him back into the room. "There is no harm done, beyond what a basin of water can repair."

"No harm!" cried Newman, passing his hands hastily over the back and arms of Nicholas, as if to assure himself that he had broken no bones. "What have you been doing?"

"I know all," interrupted Nicholas; "I have heard a part, and guessed the rest. But, before I remove one jot of these stains, I must hear the whole from you. You see I am collected. My resolution is taken. Now, my good friend, speak out; for the time for any palliation or concealment is past, and nothing will avail Ralph Nickleby now."

"Your dress is torn in several places; you walk lame, and I am sure you are suffering

pain," said Newman. "Let me see to your hurts first."

"I have no hurts to see to, beyond a little soreness and stiffness that will soon pass off," said Nicholas, seating himself with some difficulty. "But if I had fractured every limb, and still preserved my senses, you should not bandage one till you had told me what I have the right to know. Come!" said Nicholas, giving his hand to Noggs. "You had a sister of your own, you told me once, who died before you fell into misfortune. Now, think of her, and tell me, Newman."

"Yes, I will, I will," said Noggs. "I'll tell you the whole truth."

Newman did so. Nicholas nodded his head from time to time, as it corroborated the particulars he had already gleaned; but he fixed his eyes upon the fire, and did not look round once.

His recital ended, Newman insisted upon his young friend's stripping off his coat, and allowing whatever injuries he had received to be properly tended. Nicholas, after some opposition, at length consented, and while some pretty severe bruises on his arms and shoulders were being rubbed with oil and vinegar, and various other efficacious remedies which Newman borrowed from the different lodgers, related in what manner they had been received. The recital made a strong impression on the warm imagination of Newman; for, when Nicholas came to the violent part of the quarrel, he rubbed so hard as to occasion him the most exquisite pain, which he would not have exhibited, however, for the world, it being perfectly clear that, for the moment, Newman was operating on Sir Mulberry Hawk, and had quite lost sight of his real patient.

This martyrdom over, Nicholas arranged with Newman that while he was otherwise occupied next morning, arrangements should be made for his mother's immediately quitting her present residence, and also for dispatching Miss La Creevy to break the intelligence to her. He then wrapped himself in Smike's great-coat, and repaired to the inn where they were to pass the night, and where (after writing a few lines to Ralph, the delivery of which was to be intrusted to Newman next day), he endeavoured to obtain the repose of which he stood so much in need.

Drunken men, they say, may roll down precipices, and be quite unconscious of any serious personal inconvenience when their reason returns. The remark may possibly apply to injuries received in other kinds of violent excitement: certain it is that, although Nicholas experienced some pain on first awakening next morning, he sprung out of bed as the clock struck seven, with very little difficulty, and was soon as much on the alert as if nothing had occurred.

Merely looking into Smike's room, and telling him that Newman Noggs would call for him very shortly, Nicholas descended into the street, and, calling a hackney coach, bade the man drive to Mrs. Wititterly's, according to the direction which Newman had given him on the previous night.

It wanted a quarter to eight when they reached Cadogan Place. Nicholas began to fear that no one might be stirring at that early hour, when he was relieved by the sight of a female servant, employed in cleaning the door-steps. By this functionary he was referred to the doubtful page, who appeared with dishevelled hair and a very warm and glossy face, as of a page who had just got out of bed.

By this young gentleman he was informed that Miss Nickleby was then taking her morning's walk in the gardens before the house. On the question being propounded whether he could go and find her, the page desponded, and thought not; but, being stimulated with a shilling, the page grew sanguine, and thought he could.

"Say to Miss Nickleby that her brother is here, and in great haste to see her," said Nicholas.

The plated buttons disappeared with an alacrity most unusual to them, and Nicholas paced the room in a state of feverish agitation which made the delay even of a minute insupportable. He soon heard a light footstep which he well knew, and, before he could advance to meet her, Kate had fallen on his neck and burst into tears.

"My darling girl!" said Nicholas as he embraced her. "How pale you are!"

"I have been so unhappy here, dear brother," sobbed poor Kate; "so very, very miserable. Do not leave me here, dear Nicholas, or I shall die of a broken heart."

"I will leave you nowhere," answered Nicholas—"never again, Kate," he cried, moved in spite of himself, as he folded her to his heart. "Tell me that I acted for the best. Tell me that we parted because I feared to bring misfortune on your head; that it was a trial to me, no less than to yourself, and that if I did wrong it was in ignorance of the world, and unknowingly."

"Why should I tell you what we know so well?" returned Kate soothingly. "Nicholas—dear Nicholas—how can you give way thus?"

"It is such bitter reproach to me to know what you have undergone," returned her brother; "to see you so much altered, and yet so

kind and patient. God!" cried Nicholas, clenching his fist, and suddenly changing his tone and manner, "it sets my whole blood on fire again. You must leave here with me directly; you should not have slept here last night, but that I knew all this too late. To whom can I speak before we drive away?"

This question was most opportunely put, for at that instant Mr. Wititterly walked in, and to him Kate introduced her brother, who at once announced his purpose, and the impossibility of deferring it.

"The quarter's notice," said Mr. Wititterly with the gravity of a man on the right side, "is not yet half expired. Therefore——"

"Therefore," interposed Nicholas, "the quarter's salary must be lost, sir. You will excuse this extreme haste, but circumstances require that I should immediately remove my sister, and I have not a moment's time to lose. Whatever she brought here I will send for, if you will allow me, in the course of the day."

Mr. Wititterly bowed, but offered no opposition to Kate's immediate departure; with which, indeed, he was rather gratified than otherwise, Sir Tumley Snuffim having given it as his opinion that she rather disagreed with Mrs. Wititterly's constitution.

"With regard to the trifle of salary that is due," said Mr. Wititterly, "I will"—here he was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing—"I will—owe it to Miss Nickleby."

Mr. Wititterly, it should be observed, was accustomed to owe small accounts, and to leave them owing. All men have some little pleasant way of their own; and this was Mr. Wititterly's.

"If you please," said Nicholas. And, once more offering a hurried apology for so sudden a departure, he hurried Kate into the vehicle, and bade the man drive with all speed into the City.

To the City they went accordingly, with all the speed the hackney coach could make; and as the horses happened to live at Whitechapel, and to be in the habit of taking their breakfast there, when they breakfasted at all, they performed the journey with greater expedition than could reasonably have been expected.

Nicholas sent Kate up-stairs a few minutes before him, that his unlooked-for appearance might not alarm his mother, and, when the way had been paved, presented himself with much duty and affection. Newman had not been idle, for there was a little cart at the door, and the effects were hurrying out already.

Now, Mrs. Nickleby was not the sort of person to be told anything in a hurry, or rather, to comprehend anything of peculiar delicacy or importance on a short notice. Wherefore, although the good lady had been subjected to a full hour's preparation by little Miss La Creevy, and was now addressed in most lucid terms both by Nicholas and his sister, she was in a state of singular bewilderment and confusion, and could by no means be made to comprehend the necessity of such hurried proceedings.

"Why don't you ask your uncle, my dear Nicholas, what he can possibly mean by it?" said Mrs. Nickleby.

"My dear mother," returned Nicholas, "the time for talking has gone by. There is but one step to take, and that is to cast him off with the scorn and indignation he deserves. Your own honour and good name demand that, after the discovery of his vile proceedings, you should not be beholden to him one hour, even for the shelter of these bare walls."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Nickleby, crying bitterly, "he is a brute, a monster; and the walls are very bare, and want painting too, and I have had this ceiling whitewashed at the expense of eighteen-pence, which is a very distressing thing, considering that it is so much gone into your uncle's pocket. I never could have believed it—never."

"Nor I, nor anybody else," said Nicholas.

"Lord bless my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby. "To think that that Sir Mulberry Hawk should be such an abandoned wretch as Miss La Creevy says he is, Nicholas, my dear; when I was congratulating myself every day on his being an admirer of our dear Kate's, and thinking what a thing it would be for the family if he was to become connected with us, and use his interest to get you some profitable government place. There are very good places to be got about the court, I know; for a friend of ours (Miss Cropley, at Exeter, my dear Kate, you recollect), he had one, and I know that it was the chief part of his duty to wear silk stockings, and a bag-wig like a black watch pocket; and to think that it should come to this after all—oh dear, dear, it's enough to kill one, that it is!" With which expressions of sorrow, Mrs. Nickleby gave fresh vent to her grief, and wept piteously.

As Nicholas and his sister were by this time compelled to superintend the removal of the few articles of furniture, Miss La Creevy devoted herself to the consolation of the matron, and observed, with great kindness of manner, that she must really make an effort, and cheer up.

"Oh! I dare say, Miss La Creevy," returned Mrs. Nickleby with a petulance not unnatural

in her unhappy circumstances, "it's very easy to say cheer up, but if you had as many occasions to cheer up as I have had—— And there!" said Mrs. Nickleby, stopping short. "Think of Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, two of the most perfect gentlemen that ever lived, what am I to say to them—what can I say to them? Why, if I was to say to them, 'I'm told your friend Sir Mulberry is a base wretch,' they'd laugh at me."

"They will laugh no more at us, I take it," said Nicholas, advancing. "Come, mother, there is a coach at the door, and until Monday, at all events, we will return to our old quarters."

"—Where everything is ready, and a hearty welcome into the bargain," added Miss La Creevy. "Now, let me go with you downstairs."

But Mrs. Nickleby was not to be so easily moved, for first she insisted on going up-stairs to see that nothing had been left, and then on going down-stairs to see that everything had been taken away; and when she was getting into the coach she had a vision of a forgotten coffee-pot on the back-kitchen hob, and, after she was shut in, a dismal recollection of a green umbrella behind some unknown door. At last, Nicholas, in a condition of absolute despair, ordered the coachman to drive away, and, in the unexpected jerk of a sudden starting, Mrs. Nickleby lost a shilling among the straw, which fortunately confined her attention to the coach until it was too late to remember anything else.

Having seen everything safely out, discharged the servant, and locked the door, Nicholas jumped into a cabriolet, and drove to a by-place near Golden Square, where he had appointed to meet Noggs; and so quickly had everything been done, that it was barely half-past nine when he reached the place of meeting.

"Here is the letter for Ralph," said Nicholas, "and here the key. When you come to me this evening, not a word of last night. Ill news travels fast, and they will know it soon enough. Have you heard if he was much hurt?"

Newman shook his head.

"I will ascertain that myself without loss of time," said Nicholas.

"You had better take some rest," returned Newman. "You are fevered and ill."

Nicholas waved his hand carelessly, and concealing the indisposition he really felt, now that the excitement which had sustained him was over, took a hurried farewell of Newman Noggs, and left him.

Newman was not three minutes' walk from Golden Square, but, in the course of that three minutes, he took the letter out of his hat and put it in again twenty times at least. First the front, then the back, then the sides, then the superscription, then the seal, were objects of Newman's admiration. Then he held it at arm's length, as if to take in the whole at one delicious survey, and then he rubbed his hands in a perfect ecstasy with his commission.

He reached the office, hung his hat on its accustomed peg, laid the letter and key upon the desk, and waited impatiently until Ralph Nickleby should appear. After a few minutes, the well-known creaking of his boots was heard on the stairs, and then the bell rung.

"Has the post come in?"

"No."

"Any other letters?"

"One." Newman eyed him closely, and laid it on the desk.

"What's this?" asked Ralph, taking up the key.

"Left with the letter;—a boy brought them—quarter of an hour ago, or less."

Ralph glanced at the direction, opened the letter, and read as follows:—

"You are known to me now. There are no reproaches I could heap upon your head which would carry with them one thousandth part of the grovelling shame that this assurance will awaken even in your breast.

"Your brother's widow and her orphan child spurn the shelter of your roof, and shun you with disgust and loathing. Your kindred renounce you, for they know no shame but the ties of blood which bind them in name with you.

"You are an old man, and I leave you to the grave. May every recollection of your life cling to your false heart, and cast their darkness on your death-bed!"

Ralph Nickleby read this letter twice, and, frowning heavily, fell into a fit of musing; the paper fluttered from his hand, and dropped upon the floor, but he clasped his fingers, as if he held it still.

Suddenly, he started from his seat, and, thrusting it all crumpled into his pocket, turned furiously to Newman Noggs, as though to ask him why he lingered. But Newman stood unmoved, with his back towards him, following up, with the worn and blackened stump of an old pen, some figures in an Interest-table which was pasted against the wall, and apparently quite abstracted from every other object.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEREIN MR. RALPH NICKLEBY IS VISITED BY PERSONS WITH WHOM THE READER HAS BEEN ALREADY MADE ACQUAINTED.

"WHAT a demnition long time you have kept me ringing at this confounded old cracked tea-kettle of a bell, every tinkle of which is enough to throw a strong man into blue convulsions, upon my life and soul, oh demmit!" said Mr. Mantalini to Newman Noggs, scraping his boots, as he spoke, on Ralph Nickleby's scraper.

"I didn't hear the bell more than once," replied Newman.

"Then you are most immensely and outrageously deaf," said Mr. Mantalini, "as deaf as a demnition post."

Mr. Mantalini had got by this time into the passage, and was making his way to the door of Ralph's office with very little ceremony, when Newman interposed his body; and, hinting that Mr. Nickleby was unwilling to be disturbed, inquired whether the client's business was of a pressing nature.

"It is most demnebly particular," said Mr. Mantalini. "It is to melt some scraps of dirty paper into bright, shining, chinking, tinkling, demd mint sauce."

Newman uttered a significant grunt, and, taking Mr. Mantalini's proffered card, limped with it into his master's office. As he thrust his head in at the door, he saw that Ralph had resumed the thoughtful posture into which he had fallen after perusing his nephew's letter, and that he seemed to have been reading it again, as he once more held it open in his hand. The glance was but momentary, for Ralph, being disturbed, turned to demand the cause of the interruption.

As Newman stated it, the cause himself swaggered into the room, and, grasping Ralph's horny hand with uncommon affection, vowed that he had never seen him looking so well in all his life.

"There is quite a bloom upon your demd countenance," said Mr. Mantalini, seating himself unbidden, and arranging his hair and whiskers. "You look quite juvenile and jolly, demmit!"

"We are alone," returned Ralph tartly. "What do you want with me?"

"Good!" cried Mr. Mantalini, displaying his teeth. "What did I want? Yes. Ha, ha! Very good. *What* did I want? Ha, ha! Oh, dem!"

"What *do* you want, man?" demanded Ralph sternly.

"Demnition discount," returned Mr. Mantalini with a grin, and shaking his head waggishly.

"Money is scarce," said Ralph.

"Demd scarce, or I shouldn't want it," interrupted Mr. Mantalini.

"The times are bad, and one scarcely knows whom to trust," continued Ralph. "I don't want to do business just now; in fact, I would rather not; but, as you are a friend—— How many bills have you there?"

"Two," returned Mr. Mantalini.

"What is the gross amount?"

"Demd trifling—five-and-seventy."

"And the dates?"

"Two months, and four."

"I'll do them for you—mind, for *you;* I wouldn't for many people—for five-and-twenty pounds," said Ralph deliberately.

"Oh, demmit!" cried Mr. Mantalini, whose face lengthened considerably at this handsome proposal.

"Why, that leaves you fifty," retorted Ralph. "What would you have? Let me see the names."

"You are so demd hard, Nickleby," remonstrated Mr. Mantalini.

"Let me see the names," replied Ralph, impatiently extending his hand for the bills. "Well! They are not sure, but they are safe enough. Do you consent to the terms, and will you take the money? I don't want you to do so. I would rather you didn't."

"Demmit, Nickleby, can't you——" began Mr. Mantalini.

"No," replied Ralph, interrupting him. "I can't. Will you take the money?—down, mind; no delay, no going into the City, and pretending to negotiate with some other party who has no existence, and never had. Is it a bargain, or is it not?"

Ralph pushed some papers from him as he spoke, and carelessly rattled his cash-box, as though by mere accident. The sound was too much for Mr. Mantalini. He closed the bargain directly it reached his ears, and Ralph told the money out upon the table.

He had scarcely done so, and Mr. Mantalini had not yet gathered it all up, when a ring was heard at the bell, and immediately afterwards Newman ushered in no less a person than Madame Mantalini, at sight of whom Mr. Mantalini evinced considerable discomposure, and swept the cash into his pocket with remarkable alacrity.

"Oh, you *are* here!" said Madame Mantalini, tossing her head.

"Yes, my life and soul, I am," replied her

husband, dropping on his knees, and pouncing with kitten-like playfulness upon a stray sovereign. "I am here, my soul's delight, upon Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up the demnition gold and silver."

"I am ashamed of you," said Madame Mantalini with much indignation.

"Ashamed—of *me*, my joy? It knows it is talking demd charming sweetness, but naughty fibs," returned Mr. Mantalini. "It knows it is not ashamed of its own popolorum tibby."

Whatever were the circumstances which had led to such a result, it certainly appeared as though the popolorum tibby had rather miscalculated, for the nonce, the extent of his lady's affection. Madame Mantalini only looked scornful in reply; and, turning to Ralph, begged him to excuse her intrusion.

"Which is entirely attributable," said madame, "to the gross misconduct and most improper behaviour of Mr. Mantalini."

"Of me, my essential juice of pine-apple!"

"Of you," returned his wife. "But I will not allow it. I will not submit to be ruined by the extravagance and profligacy of any man. I call Mr. Nickleby to witness the course I intend to pursue with you."

"Pray don't call me to witness anything, ma'am," said Ralph. "Settle it between yourselves, settle it between yourselves."

"No, but I must beg you as a favour," said Madame Mantalini, "to hear me give him notice of what it is my fixed intention to do—my fixed intention, sir," repeated Madame Mantalini, darting an angry look at her husband.

"Will she call me 'Sir?'" cried Mantalini. "Me who dote upon her with the demdest ardour! She, who coils her fascinations round me like a pure angelic rattlesnake! It will be all up with my feelings; she will throw me into a demd state."

"Don't talk of feelings, sir," rejoined Madame Mantalini, seating herself, and turning her back upon him. "You don't consider mine."

"I do not consider yours, my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Mantalini.

"No," replied his wife.

And, notwithstanding various blandishments on the part of Mr. Mantalini, Madame Mantalini still said no, and said it, too, with such determined and resolute ill-temper, that Mr. Mantalini was clearly taken aback.

"His extravagance, Mr. Nickleby," said Madame Mantalini, addressing herself to Ralph, who leant against his easy-chair with his hands behind him, and regarded the amiable couple with a smile of the supremest and most unmitigated contempt,—"his extravagance is beyond all bounds."

"I should scarcely have supposed it," answered Ralph sarcastically.

"I assure you, Mr. Nickleby, however, that it is," returned Madame Mantalini. "It makes me miserable! I am under constant apprehensions, and in constant difficulty. And even this," said Madame Mantalini, wiping her eyes, "is not the worst. He took some papers of value out of my desk this morning without asking my permission."

Mr. Mantalini groaned slightly, and buttoned his trousers pocket.

"I am obliged," continued Madame Mantalini, "since our late misfortunes, to pay Miss Knag a great deal of money for having her name in the business, and I really cannot afford to encourage him in all his wastefulness. As I have no doubt that he came straight here, Mr. Nickleby, to convert the papers I have spoken of into money, and as you have assisted us very often before, and are very much connected with us in this kind of matters, I wish you to know the determination at which his conduct has compelled me to arrive."

Mr. Mantalini groaned once more from behind his wife's bonnet, and, fitting a sovereign into one of his eyes, winked with the other at Ralph. Having achieved this performance with great dexterity, he whipped the coin into his pocket, and groaned again with increased penitence.

"I have made up my mind," said Madame Mantalini as tokens of impatience manifested themselves in Ralph's countenance, "to allowance him."

"To do what, my joy?" inquired Mr. Mantalini, who did not seem to have caught the words.

"To put him," said Madame Mantalini, looking at Ralph, and prudently abstaining from the slightest glance at her husband, lest his many graces should induce her to falter in her resolution, "to put him upon a fixed allowance; and I say that if he has a hundred and twenty pounds a year for his clothes and pocket money, he may consider himself a very fortunate man."

Mr. Mantalini waited, with much decorum, to hear the amount of the proposed stipend, but, when it reached his ears, he cast his hat and cane upon the floor, and drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, gave vent to his feelings in a dismal moan.

"Demnition!" cried Mr. Mantalini, suddenly skipping out of his chair, and as suddenly skipping into it again, to the great discomposure of his lady's nerves. "But no. It is a demd horrid dream. It is not reality. No!"

Comforting himself with this assurance, Mr. Mantalini closed his eyes, and waited patiently till such time as he should wake up.

"A very judicious arrangement," observed Ralph with a sneer, "if your husband will keep within it, ma'am—as no doubt he will."

"Demmit!" exclaimed Mr. Mantalini, opening his eyes at the sound of Ralph's voice, "it is a horrid reality. She is sitting there before me. There is the graceful outline of her form; it cannot be mistaken—there is nothing like it. The two countesses had no outlines at all, and the dowager's was a demd outline. Why is she so excruciatingly beautiful that I cannot be angry with her, even now?"

"You have brought it upon yourself, Alfred," returned Madame Mantalini—still reproachfully, but in a softened tone.

"I am a demd villain!" cried Mr. Mantalini, smiting himself on the head. "I will fill my pockets with change for a sovereign in halfpence, and drown myself in the Thames; but I will not be angry with her, even then, for I will put a note in the twopenny post as I go along, to tell her where the body is. She will be a lovely widow. I shall be a body. Some handsome women will cry; she will laugh demnebly."

"Alfred, you cruel, cruel creature!" said Madame Mantalini, sobbing at the dreadful picture.

"She calls me cruel—me—me—who for her sake will become a demd, damp, moist, unpleasant body!" exclaimed Mr. Mantalini.

"You know it almost breaks my heart even to hear you talk of such a thing," replied Madame Mantalini.

"Can I live to be mistrusted?" cried her husband. "Have I cut my heart into a demd extraordinary number of little pieces, and given them all away, one after another, to the same little engrossing demnition captivater, and can I live to be suspected by her? Demmit, no, I can't!"

"Ask Mr. Nickleby whether the sum I have mentioned is not a proper one," reasoned Madame Mantalini.

"I don't want any sum," replied her disconsolate husband; "I shall require no demd allowance. I will be a body."

On this repetition of Mr. Mantalini's fatal threat, Madame Mantalini wrung her hands, and implored the interference of Ralph Nickleby; and after a great quantity of tears and talking, and several attempts on the part of Mr. Mantalini to reach the door, preparatory to straightway committing violence upon himself, that gentleman was prevailed upon, with difficulty, to promise that he wouldn't be a body. This great point attained, Madame Mantalini argued the question of the allowance, and Mr. Mantalini did the same, taking occasion to show that he could live with uncommon satisfaction upon bread and water, and go clad in rags, but that he could not support existence with the additional burden of being mistrusted by the object of his most devoted and disinterested affection. This brought fresh tears into Madame Mantalini's eyes, which, having just begun to open to some few of the demerits of Mr. Mantalini, were only open a very little way, and could be easily closed again. The result was, that, without quite giving up the allowance question, Madame Mantalini postponed its further consideration; and Ralph saw, clearly enough, that Mr. Mantalini had gained a fresh lease of his easy life, and that, for some time longer at all events, his degradation and downfall were postponed.

"But it will come soon enough," thought Ralph; "all love—bah! that I should use the cant of boys and girls—is fleeting enough; though that which has its sole root in the admiration of a whiskered face like that of yonder baboon, perhaps lasts the longest, as it originates in the greater blindness, and is fed by vanity. Meantime, the fools bring grist to my mill, so let them live out their day, and the longer it is, the better."

These agreeable reflections occurred to Ralph Nickleby, as sundry small caresses and endearments, supposed to be unseen, were exchanged between the objects of his thoughts.

"If you have nothing more to say, my dear, to Mr. Nickleby," said Madame Mantalini, "we will take our leaves. I am sure we have detained him much too long already."

Mr. Mantalini answered, in the first instance, by tapping Madame Mantalini several times on the nose, and then by remarking in words that he had nothing more to say.

"Demmit! I have, though," he added almost immediately, drawing Ralph into a corner. "Here's an affair about your friend Sir Mulberry! Such a demd extraordinary out-of-the-way kind of thing as never was—eh?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ralph.

"Don't you know, demmit?" asked Mr. Mantalini.

"I see by the paper that he was thrown from his cabriolet last night, and severely injured, and that his life is in some danger," answered Ralph with great composure; "but I see nothing extraordinary in that—accidents are not miraculous events, when men live hard, and drive after dinner."

"Whew!" cried Mr. Mantalini in a long shrill whistle. "Then don't you know how it was?"

"Not unless it was as I have just supposed," replied Ralph, shrugging his shoulders carelessly, as if to give his questioner to understand that he had no curiosity upon the subject.

"Demmit, you amaze me!" cried Mantalini.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders again, as if it were no great feat to amaze Mr. Mantalini, and cast a wistful glance at the face of Newman Noggs, which had several times appeared behind a couple of panes of glass in the room-door; it being a part of Newman's duty, when unimportant people called, to make various feints of supposing that the bell had rung for him to show them out: by way of a gentle hint to such visitors that it was time to go.

"Don't you know," said Mr. Mantalini, taking Ralph by the button, "that it wasn't an accident at all, but a demd furious, manslaughtering attack made upon him by your nephew?"

"What!" snarled Ralph, clenching his fists and turning a livid white.

"Demmit, Nickleby, you're as great a tiger as he is," said Mantalini, alarmed at these demonstrations.

"Go on," cried Ralph. "Tell me what you mean. What is this story? Who told you? Speak!" growled Ralph. "Do you hear me?"

"'Gad, Nickleby," said Mr. Mantalini, retreating towards his wife, "what a demneble fierce old evil genius you are! You're enough to frighten my life and soul out of her little delicious wits—flying all at once into such a blazing, ravaging, raging passion as never was, demmit!"

"Pshaw!" rejoined Ralph, forcing a smile. "It is but manner."

"It is a demd uncomfortable, private-madhouse sort of a manner," said Mr. Mantalini, picking up his cane.

Ralph affected to smile, and once more inquired from whom Mr. Mantalini had derived his information.

"From Pyke; and a demd fine, pleasant, gentlemanly dog it is," replied Mantalini. "Demnition pleasant, and a tiptop sawyer."

"And what said he?" asked Ralph, knitting his brows.

"That it happened this way—that your nephew met him at a coffee-house, fell upon him with the most demneble ferocity, followed him to his cab, swore he would ride home with him, if he rode upon the horse's back, or hooked himself on to the horse's tail; smashed his countenance, which is a demd fine countenance in its natural state; frightened the horse, pitched out Sir Mulberry and himself, and——"

"And was killed?" interposed Ralph with gleaming eyes. "Was he? Is he dead?"

Mantalini shook his head.

"Ugh!" said Ralph, turning away. "Then he has done nothing. Stay," he added, looking round again. "He broke a leg or an arm, or put his shoulder out, or fractured his collar bone, or ground a rib or two? His neck was saved for the halter, but he got some painful and slow-healing injury for his trouble—did he? You must have heard that, at least."

"No," rejoined Mantalini, shaking his head again. "Unless he was dashed into such little pieces that they blew away, he wasn't hurt, for he went off as quiet and comfortable as—as—as demnition," said Mr. Mantalini, rather at a loss for a simile.

"And what," said Ralph, hesitating a little, "what was the cause of quarrel?"

"You are the demdest, knowing hand," replied Mr. Mantalini in an admiring tone, "the cunningest, rummest, superlativest old fox—oh, dem!—to pretend now not to know that it was the little bright-eyed niece—the softest, sweetest, prettiest——"

"Alfred!" interposed Madame Mantalini.

"She is always right," rejoined Mr. Mantalini soothingly, "and, when she says it is time to go, it is time, and go she shall; and, when she walks along the streets with her own tulip, the women shall say with envy, she has got a demd fine husband; and the men shall say with rapture, he has got a demd fine wife; and they shall both be right, and neither wrong, upon my life and soul—oh, demmit!"

With which remarks, and many more, no less intellectual and to the purpose, Mr. Mantalini kissed the fingers of his gloves to Ralph Nickleby, and, drawing his lady's arm through his, led her mincingly away.

"So, so," muttered Ralph, dropping into his chair: "this devil is loose again, and thwarting me, as he was born to do, at every turn. He told me once there should be a day of reckoning between us, sooner or later. I'll make him a true prophet, for it shall surely come."

"Are you at home?" asked Newman, suddenly popping in his head.

"No," replied Ralph with equal abruptness.

Newman withdrew his head, but thrust it in again.

"You're quite sure you're not at home, are you?" said Newman.

"What does the idiot mean?" cried Ralph testily.

"He has been waiting nearly ever since they first came in, and may have heard your voice—that's all," said Newman, rubbing his hands.

"Who has?" demanded Ralph, wrought by the intelligence he had just heard, and his clerk's provoking coolness, to an intense pitch of irritation.

The necessity of a reply was superseded by the unlooked-for entrance of a third party—the individual in question—who, bringing his one eye (for he had but one) to bear on Ralph Nickleby, made a great many shambling bows, and sat himself down in an arm-chair, with his hands on his knees, and his short black trousers drawn up so high in the legs by the exertion of seating himself, that they scarcely reached below the tops of his Wellington boots.

"Why, this *is* a surprise!" said Ralph, bending his gaze upon the visitor, and half smiling as he scrutinised him attentively; "I should know your face, Mr. Squeers."

"Ah!" replied that worthy, "and you'd have knowed it better, sir, if it hadn't been for all that I've been a-going through. Just lift that little boy off the tall stool in the back-office, and tell him to come in here, will you, my man?" said Squeers, addressing himself to Newman. "Oh! he's lifted hisself off. My son, sir, little Wackford. What do you think of him, sir, for a specimen of the Dotheboys Hall feeding? Ain't he fit to bust out of his clothes, and start the seams, and make the very buttons fly off with his fatness? Here's flesh!" cried Squeers, turning the boy about, and indenting the plumpest parts of his figure with divers pokes and punches, to the great discomposure of his son and heir. "Here's firmness, here's solidness! Why, you can hardly get up enough of him between your finger and thumb to pinch him anywheres."

In however good condition Master Squeers might have been, he certainly did not present this remarkable compactness of person, for, on his father's closing his finger and thumb in illustration of his remark, he uttered a sharp cry, and rubbed the place in the most natural manner possible.

"Well," remarked Squeers, a little disconcerted, "I had him there; but that's because we breakfasted early this morning, and he hasn't had his lunch yet. Why, you couldn't shut a bit of him in a door, when he's had his dinner. Look at them tears, sir," said Squeers with a triumphant air, as Master Wackford wiped his eyes with the cuff of his jacket; "there's oiliness!"

"He looks well, indeed," returned Ralph, who, for some purposes of his own, seemed desirous to conciliate the schoolmaster. "But how is Mrs. Squeers, and how are you?"

"Mrs. Squeers, sir," replied the proprietor of Dotheboys, "is as she always is—a mother to them lads, and a blessing, and a comfort, and a joy to all them as knows her. One of our boys—gorging hisself with vittles, and then turning ill; that's their way—got a abscess on him last week. To see how she operated upon him with a penknife! Oh Lor!" said Squeers, heaving a sigh, and nodding his head a great many times, "what a member of society that woman is!"

Mr. Squeers indulged in a retrospective look for some quarter of a minute, as if this allusion to his lady's excellences had naturally led his mind to the peaceful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire; and then looked at Ralph, as if waiting for him to say something.

"Have you quite recovered that scoundrel's attack?" asked Ralph.

"I've only just done it, if I've done it now," replied Squeers. "I was one blessed bruise, sir," said Squeers, touching first the roots of his hair, and then the toes of his boots, "from *here* to *there*. Vinegar and brown paper, vinegar and brown paper, from morning to night. I suppose there was a matter of half a ream of brown paper stuck upon me, from first to last. As I laid all of a heap in our kitchen, plastered all over, you might have thought I was a large brown-paper parcel, chock-full of nothing but groans. Did I groan loud, Wackford, or did I groan soft?" asked Mr. Squeers, appealing to his son.

"Loud," replied Wackford.

"Was the boys sorry to see me in such a dreadful condition, Wackford, or was they glad?" asked Mr. Squeers in a sentimental manner.

"Gl——"

"Eh?" cried Squeers, turning sharp round.

"Sorry," rejoined his son.

"Oh!" said Squeers, catching him a smart box on the ear. "Then take your hands out of your pockets, and don't stammer when you're asked a question. Hold your noise, sir, in a gentleman's office, or I'll run away from my family, and never come back any more; and then what would become of all them precious and forlorn lads as would be let loose on the world, without their best friend at their elbers?"

"Were you obliged to have medical attendance?" inquired Ralph.

"Ay, was I," rejoined Squeers, "and a pre-

cious bill the medical attendant brought in, too; but I paid it, though."

Ralph elevated his eyebrows in a manner which might be expressive of either sympathy or astonishment—just as the beholder was pleased to take it.

"Yes, I paid it, every farthing," replied Squeers, who seemed to know the man he had to deal with too well to suppose that any blinking of the question would induce him to subscribe towards the expenses; "I wasn't out of pocket by it after all, either."

"No?" said Ralph.

"Not a halfpenny," replied Squeers. "The fact is, we have only one extra with our boys, and that is for doctors when required—and not then, unless we're sure of our customers. Do you see?"

"I understand," said Ralph.

"Very good," rejoined Squeers. "Then,

"LOOK AT THEM TEARS, SIR," SAID SQUEERS WITH A TRIUMPHANT AIR, AS MASTER WACKFORD WIPED HIS EYES WITH THE CUFF OF HIS JACKET; "THERE'S OILINESS!"

after my bill was run up, we picked out five little boys (sons of small tradesmen, as was sure pay) that had never had the scarlet fever, and we sent one to a cottage where they'd got it, and he took it, and then we put the four others to sleep with him, and *they* took it, and then the doctor came and attended 'em once all round, and we divided my total among 'em, and added it on to their little bills, and the parents paid it. Ha! ha! ha!"

"And a good plan too," said Ralph, eyeing the schoolmaster stealthily.

"I believe you," rejoined Squeers. "We always do it. Why, when Mrs. Squeers was brought to bed with little Wackford here, we ran the hooping-cough through half-a-dozen boys, and charged her expenses among 'em, monthly nurse included. Ha! ha! ha!"

Ralph never laughed, but on this occasion he produced the nearest approach to it that he

could, and, waiting until Mr. Squeers had enjoyed the professional joke to his heart's content, inquired what had brought him to town.

"Some bothering law business," replied Squeers, scratching his head, "connected with an action for what they call neglect of a boy. I don't know what they would have. He had as good grazing, that boy had, as there is about us."

Ralph looked as if he did not quite understand the observation.

"Grazing," said Squeers, raising his voice, under the impression that, as Ralph failed to comprehend him, he must be deaf. "When a boy gets weak and ill, and don't relish his meals, we give him a change of diet—turn him out, for an hour or so every day, into a neighbour's turnip-field, or sometimes, if it's a delicate case, a turnip-field and a piece of carrots alternately, and let him eat as many as he likes. There an't better land in the county than this perwerse lad grazed on, and yet he goes and catches cold and indigestion and what not, and then his friends brings a lawsuit against *me!* Now, you'd hardly suppose," added Squeers, moving in his chair with the impatience of an ill-used man, "that people's ingratitude would carry them quite as far as that; would you?"

"A hard case, indeed," observed Ralph.

"You don't say more than the truth when you say that," replied Squeers. "I don't suppose there's a man going as possesses the fondness for youth that I do. There's youth to the amount of eight hundred pound a year at Dotheboys Hall at this present time. I'd take sixteen hundred pound worth if I could get 'em, and be as fond of every individual twenty pound among 'em as nothing should equal it!"

"Are you stopping at your old quarters?" asked Ralph.

"Yes, we are at the Saracen," replied Squeers, "and, as it don't want very long to the end of the half-year, we shall continney to stop there till I've collected the money, and some new boys too, I hope. I've brought little Wackford up on purpose to show to parents and guardians. I shall put him in the advertisement this time. Look at that boy—himself a pupil—why, he's a miracle of high feeding, that boy is!"

"I should like to have a word with you," said Ralph, who had both spoken and listened mechanically for some time, and seemed to have been thinking.

"As many words as you like, sir," rejoined Squeers. "Wackford, you go and play in the back-office, and don't move about too much, or you'll get thin, and that won't do. You haven't got such a thing as twopence, Mr. Nickleby, have you?" said Squeers, rattling a bunch of keys in his coat pocket, and muttering something about its being all silver.

"I—think I have," said Ralph very slowly, and producing, after much rummaging in an old drawer, a penny, a halfpenny, and two farthings.

"Thankee," said Squeers, bestowing it upon his son. "Here! You go and buy a tart—Mr. Nickleby's man will show you where—and mind you buy a rich one. Pastry," added Squeers, closing the door on Master Wackford, "makes his flesh shine a good deal, and parents thinks that a healthy sign."

With this explanation, and a peculiarly knowing look to eke it out, Mr. Squeers moved his chair so as to bring himself opposite to Ralph Nickleby at no great distance off; and, having planted it to his entire satisfaction, sat down.

"Attend to me," said Ralph, bending forward a little.

Squeers nodded.

"I am not to suppose," said Ralph, 'that you are dolt enough to forgive or forget, very readily, the violence that was committed upon you, or the exposure which accompanied it?"

"Devil a bit," replied Squeers tartly.

"Or to lose an opportunity of repaying it with interest, if you could get one?" said Ralph.

"Show me one, and try," rejoined Squeers.

"Some such object it was that induced you to call on me?" said Ralph, raising his eyes to the schoolmaster's face.

"N—n—no, I don't know that," replied Squeers. "I thought that if it was in your power to make me, besides the trifle of money you sent, any compensation——"

"Ah!" cried Ralph, interrupting him. "You needn't go on."

After a long pause, during which Ralph appeared absorbed in contemplation, he again broke silence by asking:

"Who is this boy that he took with him?"

Squeers stated his name.

"Was he young or old, healthy or sickly, tractable or rebellious? Speak out, man!" retorted Ralph.

"Why, he wasn't young," answered Squeers; "that is, not young for a boy, you know."

"That is, he was not a boy at all, I suppose?" interrupted Ralph.

"Well," returned Squeers briskly, as if he felt relieved by the suggestion, "he might have been nigh twenty. He wouldn't seem so old, though, to them as didn't know him, for he was a little wanting here," touching his forehead; "nobody at home, you know, if you knocked ever so often."

"And you *did* knock pretty often, I dare say?" muttered Ralph.

"Pretty well," returned Squeers with a grin.

"When you wrote to acknowledge the receipt of this trifle of money as you call it," said Ralph, "you told me his friends had deserted him long ago, and that you had not the faintest clue or trace to tell you who he was. Is that the truth?"

"It is, worse luck!" replied Squeers, becoming more and more easy and familiar in his manner as Ralph pursued his inquiries with the less reserve. "It's fourteen years ago, by the entry in my book, since a strange man brought him to my place, one autumn night, and left him there; paying five pound five, for his first quarter, in advance. He might have been five or six year old at that time—not more."

"What more do you know about him?" demanded Ralph.

"Devilish little, I'm sorry to say," replied Squeers. "The money was paid for some six or eight year, and then it stopped. He had given an address in London, had this chap; but, when it came to the point, of course nobody knowed anything about him. So I kept the lad out of—out of——"

"Charity?" suggested Ralph drily.

"Charity, to be sure," returned Squeers, rubbing his knees: "and, when he begins to be useful in a certain sort of way, this young scoundrel of a Nickleby comes and carries him off. But the most vexatious and aggeravating part of the whole affair is," said Squeers, dropping his voice, and drawing his chair still closer to Ralph, "that some questions have been asked about him at last—not of me, but in a roundabout kind of way, of people in our village. So that just when I might have had all arrears paid up, perhaps, and perhaps—who knows? such things have happened in our business before—a present besides for putting him out to a farmer, or sending him to sea, so that he might never turn up to disgrace his parents, supposing him to be a natural boy, as many of our boys are—damme, if that villain of a Nickleby don't collar him in open day, and commit as good as highway robbery upon my pocket."

"We will both cry quits with him before long," said Ralph, laying his hand on the arm of the Yorkshire schoolmaster.

"Quits!" echoed Squeers. "Ah! and I should like to leave a small balance in his favour, to be settled when he can. I only wish Mrs. Squeers could catch hold of him. Bless her heart! She'd murder him, Mr. Nickleby—she would, as soon as eat her dinner."

"We will talk of this again," said Ralph. "I must have time to think of it. To wound him through his own affections and fancies—— If I could strike him through this boy——"

"Strike him how you like, sir," interrupted Squeers, "only hit him hard enough, that's all—and, with that, I'll say good morning. Here!—just chuck that little boy's hat off that corner peg, and lift him off the stool, will you?"

Bawling these requests to Newman Noggs, Mr. Squeers betook himself to the little back-office, and fitted on his child's hat with parental anxiety, while Newman, with his pen behind his ear, sat, stiff and immovable, on his stool, regarding the father and son by turns with a broad stare.

"He's a fine boy, an't he?" said Squeers, throwing his head a little on one side, and falling back to the desk, the better to estimate the proportions of little Wackford.

"Very," said Newman.

"Pretty well swelled out, an't he?" pursued Squeers. "He has the fatness of twenty boys, he has."

"Ah!" replied Newman, suddenly thrusting his face into that of Squeers, "he has;—the fatness of twenty!—more! He's got it all. God help the others! Ha! ha! Oh Lord!"

Having uttered these fragmentary observations, Newman dropped upon his desk, and began to write with most marvellous rapidity.

"Why, what does the man mean?" cried Squeers, colouring. "Is he drunk?"

Newman made no reply.

"Is he mad?" said Squeers.

But, still Newman betrayed no consciousness of any presence save his own; so, Mr. Squeers comforted himself by saying that he was both drunk *and* mad; and, with this parting observation, he led his hopeful son away.

In exact proportion as Ralph Nickleby became conscious of a struggling and lingering regard for Kate had his detestation of Nicholas augmented. It might be that, to atone for the weakness of inclining to any one person, he held it necessary to hate some other more intensely than before; but such had been the course of his feelings. And now, to be defied and spurned, to be held up to her in the worst and most repulsive colours, to know that she was taught to hate and despise him: to feel that there was infection in his touch, and taint in his companionship—to know all this, and to know that the mover of it all was that same boyish poor relation who had twitted him in their very first interview, and openly bearded and braved him since, wrought his quiet and stealthy malignity

to such a pitch, that there was scarcely anything he would not have hazarded to gratify it, if he could have seen his way to some immediate retaliation.

But, fortunately for Nicholas, Ralph Nickleby did not; and although he cast about all that day, and kept a corner of his brain working on the one anxious subject through all the round of schemes and business that came with it, night found him, at last, still harping on the same theme, and still pursuing the same unprofitable reflections.

"When my brother was such as he," said Ralph, "the first comparisons were drawn between us—always in my disfavour. *He* was open, liberal, gallant, gay; *I* a crafty hunks of cold and stagnant blood, with no passion but love of saving, and no spirit beyond a thirst for gain. I recollected it well when I first saw this whipster. But I remember it better now."

He had been occupied in tearing Nicholas's letter into atoms; and, as he spoke, he scattered it in a tiny shower about him.

"Recollections like these," pursued Ralph with a bitter smile, "flock upon me—when I resign myself to them—in crowds, and from countless quarters. As a portion of the world affect to despise the power of money, I must try and show them what it is."

And being, by this time, in a pleasant frame of mind for slumber, Ralph Nickleby went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SMIKE BECOMES KNOWN TO MRS. NICKLEBY AND KATE. NICHOLAS ALSO MEETS WITH NEW ACQUAINTANCES. BRIGHTER DAYS SEEM TO DAWN UPON THE FAMILY.

HAVING established his mother and sister in the apartments of the kind-hearted miniature painter, and ascertained that Sir Mulberry Hawk was in no danger of losing his life, Nicholas turned his thoughts to poor Smike, who, after breakfasting with Newman Noggs, had remained, in a disconsolate state, at that worthy creature's lodgings, waiting, with much anxiety, for further intelligence of his protector.

"As he will be one of our own little household, wherever we live, or whatever fortune is in reserve for us," thought Nicholas, "I must present the poor fellow in due form. They will be kind to him for his own sake, and if not (on that account solely) to the full extent I could wish, they will stretch a point, I am sure, for mine."

Nicholas said "they," but his misgivings were confined to one person. He was sure of Kate, but he knew his mother's peculiarities, and was not quite so certain that Smike would find favour in the eyes of Mrs. Nickleby.

"However," thought Nicholas as he departed on his benevolent errand, "she cannot fail to become attached to him when she knows what a devoted creature he is, and, as she must quickly make the discovery, his probation will be a short one."

"I was afraid," said Smike, overjoyed to see his friend again, "that you had fallen into some fresh trouble; the time seemed so long, at last, that I almost feared you were lost."

"Lost!" replied Nicholas gaily. "You will not be rid of me so easily, I promise you. I shall rise to the surface many thousand times yet, and the harder the thrust that pushes me down, the more quickly I shall rebound, Smike. But come; my errand here is to take you home."

"Home!" faltered Smike, drawing timidly back.

"Ay," rejoined Nicholas, taking his arm. "Why not?"

"I had such hopes once," said Smike; "day and night, day and night, for many years. I longed for home till I was weary, and pined away with grief, but now——"

"And what now?" asked Nicholas, looking kindly in his face. "What now, old friend?"

"I could not part from you to go to any home on earth," replied Smike, pressing his hand; "except one, except one. I shall never be an old man; and if your hand placed me in the grave, and I could think, before I died, that you would come and look upon it sometimes with one of your kind smiles, and in the summer weather, when everything was alive—not dead like me—I could go to that home almost without a tear."

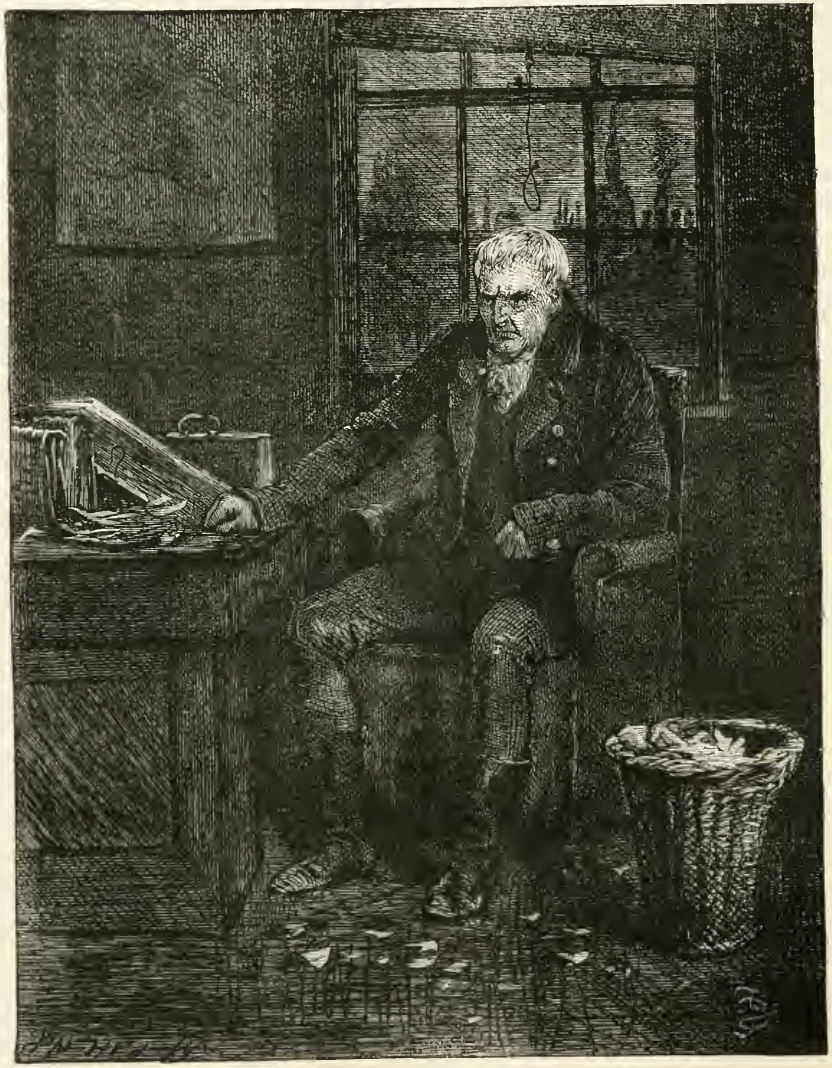
"Why do you talk thus, poor boy, if your life is a happy one with me?" said Nicholas.

"Because *I* should change; not those about me. And, if they forgot me, *I* should never know it," replied Smike. "In the churchyard we are all alike, but here there are none like me. I am a poor creature, but I know that."

"You are a foolish, silly creature," said Nicholas cheerfully. "If that is what you mean, I grant you that. Why, here's a dismal face for ladies' company!—My pretty sister, too, whom you have so often asked me about. Is this your Yorkshire gallantry? For shame! for shame!"

Smike brightened up and smiled.

"When I talk of home," pursued Nicholas, "I talk of mine—which is yours, of course. If it were defined by any particular four walls and a roof, God knows I should be sufficiently puzzled to say whereabouts it lay; but that is not what I mean. When I speak of home, I speak of the place where—in default of a better—those I love are gathered together; and if that place were a gipsy's tent, or a barn, I should call it by the same good name notwithstanding. And now for what is my present home, which,



"NIGHT FOUND HIM, AT LAST, STILL HARPING ON THE SAME THEME, AND STILL PURSUING THE SAME UNPROFITABLE REFLECTIONS."

however alarming your expectations may be, will neither terrify you by its extent nor its magnificence."

So saying, Nicholas took his companion by the arm, and saying a great deal more to the same purpose, and pointing out various things to amuse and interest him as they went along, led the way to Miss La Creevy's house.

"And this, Kate," said Nicholas, entering the room where his sister sat alone, "is the faithful friend and affectionate fellow-traveller whom I prepared you to receive."

Poor Smike was bashful, and awkward, and frightened enough at first, but Kate advanced towards him so kindly, and said, in such a sweet voice, how anxious she had been to see him after all her brother had told her, and how much she had to thank him for having comforted Nicholas so greatly in their very trying reverses, that he began to be very doubtful whether he should shed tears or not, and became still more flurried. However, he managed to say, in a broken voice, that Nicholas was his only friend, and that he would lay down his life to help him; and Kate, although she was so kind and considerate, seemed to be so wholly unconscious of his distress and embarrassment, that he recovered almost immediately, and felt quite at home.

Then, Miss La Creevy came in; and to her Smike had to be presented also. And Miss La Creevy was very kind too, and wonderfully talkative :—not to Smike, for that would have made him uneasy at first, but to Nicholas and his sister. Then, after a time, she would speak to Smike himself now and then, asking him whether he was a judge of likenesses, and whether he thought that picture in the corner was like herself, and whether he didn't think it would have looked better if she had made herself ten years younger, and whether he didn't think, as a matter of general observation, that young ladies looked better, not only in pictures, but out of them too, than old ones; with many more small jokes and facetious remarks, which were delivered with such good-humour and merriment, that Smike thought, within himself, she was the nicest lady he had ever seen; even nicer than Mrs. Grudden, of Mr. Vincent Crummles's theatre; and she was a nice lady too, and talked, perhaps more, but certainly louder, than Miss La Creevy.

At length the door opened again, and a lady in mourning came in; and Nicholas, kissing the lady in mourning affectionately, and calling her his mother, led her towards the chair from which Smike had risen when she entered the room.

"You are always kind-hearted, and anxious to help the oppressed, my dear mother," said Nicholas, "so you will be favourably disposed towards him, I know."

"I am sure, my dear Nicholas," replied Mrs. Nickleby, looking very hard at her new friend, and bending to him with something more of majesty than the occasion seemed to require,—"I am sure any friend of yours has, as indeed he naturally ought to have, and must have, of course, you know—a great claim upon me, and of course it is a very great pleasure to me to be introduced to anybody you take an interest in—there can be no doubt about that; none at all; not the least in the world," said Mrs. Nickleby. "At the same time, I must say, Nicholas, my dear, as I used to say to your poor dear papa, when he *would* bring gentlemen home to dinner, and there was nothing in the house, that if he had come the day before yesterday—no, I don't mean the day before yesterday now; I should have said, perhaps, the year before last—we should have been better able to entertain him."

With which remarks, Mrs. Nickleby turned to her daughter, and inquired, in an audible whisper, whether the gentleman was going to stop all night.

"Because, if he is, Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't see that it's possible for him to sleep anywhere, and that's the truth."

Kate stepped gracefully forward, and, without any show of annoyance or irritation, breathed a few words into her mother's ear.

"La, Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, shrinking back, "how you do tickle one! Of course, I understand *that*, my love, without your telling me; and I said the same to Nicholas, and I *am* very much pleased. You didn't tell me, Nicholas, my dear," added Mrs. Nickleby, turning round with an air of less reserve than she had before assumed, "what your friend's name is."

"His name, mother," replied Nicholas, "is Smike."

The effect of this communication was by no means anticipated; but the name was no sooner pronounced than Mrs. Nickleby dropped upon a chair, and burst into a fit of crying.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Nicholas, running to support her.

"It's so like Pyke," cried Mrs. Nickleby; "so exactly like Pyke! Oh! don't speak to me—I shall be better presently."

And after exhibiting every symptom of slow suffocation in all its stages, and drinking about a tea-spoonful of water from a full tumbler, and spilling the remainder, Mrs. Nickleby *was* better, and remarked, with a feeble smile, that she was very foolish, she knew.

"It's a weakness in our family," said Mrs. Nickleby, "so, of course, I can't be blamed for it. Your grandmamma, Kate, was exactly the same—precisely. The least excitement, the slightest surprise, she fainted away directly. I have heard her say, often and often, that when she was a young lady, and before she was married, she was turning a corner into Oxford Street one day, when she ran against her own hairdresser, who, it seems, was escaping from a bear;—the mere suddenness of the encounter made her faint away directly. Wait, though," added Mrs.

Nickleby, pausing to consider. "Let me be sure I'm right. Was it her hairdresser who had escaped from the bear, or was it a bear who had escaped from her hairdresser's? I declare I can't remember just now, but the hairdresser was a very handsome man, I know, and quite a gentleman in his manners; so that it has nothing to do with the point of the story."

Mrs. Nickleby, having fallen imperceptibly into one of her retrospective moods, improved in temper from that moment, and glided, by an easy change of the conversation occasionally, into various other anecdotes, no less remarkable for their strict application to the subject in hand.

"Mr. Smike is from Yorkshire, Nicholas, my dear?" said Mrs. Nickleby after dinner, and when she had been silent for some time.

"Certainly, mother," replied Nicholas. "I see you have not forgotten his melancholy history."

"Oh dear no!" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "Ah! melancholy indeed. You don't happen, Mr. Smike, ever to have dined with the Grimbles of Grimble Hall, somewhere in the North Riding, do you?" said the good lady, addressing herself to him. "A very proud man, Sir Thomas Grimble, with six grown-up and most lovely daughters, and the finest park in the county."

"My dear mother," reasoned Nicholas, "do you suppose that the unfortunate outcast of a Yorkshire school was likely to receive many cards of invitation from the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood?"

"Really, my dear, I don't know why it should be so very extraordinary," said Mrs. Nickleby. "I know that, when *I* was at school, I always went at least twice every half-year to the Hawkinses at Taunton Vale, and they are much richer than the Grimbles, and connected with them in marriage; so you see it's not so very unlikely, after all."

Having put down Nicholas in this triumphant manner, Mrs. Nickleby was suddenly seized with a forgetfulness of Smike's real name, and an irresistible tendency to call him Mr. Slammons; which circumstance she attributed to the remarkable similarity of the two names in point of sound, both beginning with an S, and, moreover, being spelt with an M. But, whatever doubt there might be on this point, there was none as to his being a most excellent listener; which circumstance had considerable influence in placing them on the very best terms, and inducing Mrs. Nickleby to express the highest opinion of his general deportment and disposition.

Thus, the little circle remained, on the most amicable and agreeable footing, until the Monday morning, when Nicholas withdrew himself from it for a short time, seriously to reflect upon the state of his affairs, and to determine, if he could, upon some course of life, which would enable him to support those who were so entirely dependent upon his exertions.

Mr. Crummles occurred to him more than once; but, although Kate was acquainted with the whole history of his connection with that gentleman, his mother was not; and he foresaw a thousand fretful objections, on her part, to his seeking a livelihood upon the stage. There were graver reasons, too, against his returning to that mode of life. Independently of those arising out of its spare and precarious earnings, and his own internal conviction that he could never hope to aspire to any great distinction, even as a provincial actor, how could he carry his sister from town to town, and place to place, and debar her from any other associates than those with whom he would be compelled, almost without distinction, to mingle? "It won't do," said Nicholas, shaking his head; "I must try something else."

It was much easier to make this resolution than to carry it into effect. With no greater experience of the world than he had acquired for himself in his short trials; with a sufficient share of headlong rashness and precipitation (qualities not altogether unnatural at his time of life); with a very slender stock of money, and a still more scanty stock of friends; what could he do? "Egad!" said Nicholas, "I'll try that Register Office again."

He smiled at himself as he walked away with a quick step; for, an instant before, he had been internally blaming his own precipitation. He did not laugh himself out of the intention, however, for on he went: picturing to himself, as he approached the place, all kinds of splendid possibilities, and impossibilities too, for that matter, and thinking himself, perhaps with good reason, very fortunate to be endowed with so buoyant and sanguine a temperament.

The office looked just the same as when he had left it last, and, indeed, with one or two exceptions, there seemed to be the very same placards in the window that he had seen before. There were the same unimpeachable masters and mistresses in want of virtuous servants, and the same virtuous servants in want of unimpeachable masters and mistresses, and the same magnificent estates for the investment of capital, and the same enormous quantities of capital to be invested in estates, and, in short, the same opportunities of all sorts for people who wanted to make their fortunes. And a most extraordinary proof it

was of the national prosperity, that people had not been found to avail themselves of such advantages long ago.

As Nicholas stopped to look in at the window, an old gentleman happened to stop too; and Nicholas, carrying his eye along the window panes from left to right in search of some capital-text placard which should be applicable to his own case, caught sight of this old gentleman's figure, and instinctively withdrew his eyes from the window to observe the same more closely.

He was a sturdy old fellow in a broad-skirted blue coat, made pretty large, to fit easily, and with no particular waist: his bulky legs clothed in drab breeches and high gaiters, and his head protected by a low-crowned broad-brimmed white hat, such as a wealthy grazier might wear. He wore his coat buttoned, and his dimpled double chin rested in the folds of a white neckerchief—not one of your stiff-starched apoplectic cravats, but a good, easy, old-fashioned white neckcloth that a man might go to bed in, and be none the worse for. But what principally attracted the attention of Nicholas was the old gentleman's eye,—never was such a clear, twinkling, honest, merry, happy eye as that. And there he stood, looking a little upward, with one hand thrust into the breast of his coat, and the other playing with his old-fashioned gold watch-chain: his head thrown a little on one side, and his hat a little more on one side than his head, (but that was evidently accident; not his ordinary way of wearing it,) with such a pleasant smile playing about his mouth, and such a comical expression of mingled slyness, simplicity, kind-heartedness, and good-humour lighting up his jolly old face, that Nicholas would have been content to have stood there and looked at him until evening, and to have forgotten, meanwhile, that there was such a thing as a soured mind or a crabbed countenance to be met with in the whole wide world.

But, even a very remote approach to this gratification was not to be made, for, although he seemed quite unconscious of having been the subject of observation, he looked casually at Nicholas; and the latter, fearful of giving offence, resumed his scrutiny of the window instantly.

Still, the old gentleman stood there, glancing from placard to placard, and Nicholas could not forbear raising his eyes to his face again. Grafted upon the quaintness and oddity of his appearance was something so indescribably engaging, and bespeaking so much worth, and there were so many little lights hovering about the corners of his mouth and eyes, that it was not a mere amusement, but a positive pleasure and delight to look at him.

This being the case, it is no wonder that the old man caught Nicholas in the fact more than once. At such times Nicholas coloured and looked embarrassed: for the truth is, that he had begun to wonder whether the stranger could, by any possibility, be looking for a clerk or secretary; and, thinking this, he felt as if the old gentleman must know it.

Long as all this takes to tell, it was not more than a couple of minutes in passing. As the stranger was moving away, Nicholas caught his eye again, and, in the awkwardness of the moment, stammered out an apology.

"No offence—oh, no offence!" said the old man.

This was said in such a hearty tone, and the voice was so exactly what it should have been from such a speaker, and there was such a cordiality in the manner, that Nicholas was emboldened to speak again.

"A great many opportunities here, sir," he said, half smiling as he motioned towards the window.

"A great many people willing and anxious to be employed have seriously thought so very often, I dare say," replied the old man. "Poor fellows, poor fellows!"

He moved away as he said this; but, seeing that Nicholas was about to speak, good-naturedly slackened his pace, as if he were unwilling to cut him short. After a little of that hesitation which may be sometimes observed between two people in the street who have exchanged a nod, and are both uncertain whether they shall turn back and speak, or not, Nicholas found himself at the old man's side.

"You were about to speak, young gentleman; what were you going to say?"

"Merely that I almost hoped—I mean to say, thought—you had some object in consulting those advertisements," said Nicholas.

"Ay, ay? What object, now—what object?" returned the old man, looking slily at Nicholas. "Did you think I wanted a situation, now—eh? Did you think I did?"

Nicholas shook his head.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the old gentleman, rubbing his hands and wrists as if he were washing them. "A very natural thought, at all events, after seeing me gazing at those bills. I thought the same of you, at first; upon my word I did."

"If you had thought so at last, too, sir, you would not have been far from the truth," rejoined Nicholas.

"Eh?" cried the old man, surveying him from head to foot. "What! Dear me! No, no. Well-behaved young gentleman reduced to such a necessity! No no, no no."

Nicholas bowed, and, bidding him good morning, turned upon his heel.

"Stay," said the old man, beckoning him into a by-street, where they could converse with less interruption. "What d'ye mean, eh?"

"Merely that your kind face and manner —both so unlike any I have ever seen— tempted me into an avowal which, to any other stranger in this wilderness of London, I should not have dreamt of making," returned Nicholas.

"Wilderness! Yes, it is, it is. Good! It *is* a wilderness," said the old man with much animation. "It was a wilderness to me once. I came here barefoot—I have never forgotten it. Thank God!" and he raised his hat from his head, and looked very grave.

"What's the matter—what is it—how did it all come about?" said the old man, laying his hand on the shoulder of Nicholas, and walking him up the street. "You're—eh?" laying his finger on the sleeve of his black coat. "Who's it for—eh?"

"My father," replied Nicholas.

"Ah!" said the old gentleman quickly. "Bad thing for a young man to lose his father. Widowed mother, perhaps?"

Nicholas sighed.

"Brothers and sisters too—eh?"

"One sister," rejoined Nicholas.

"Poor thing, poor thing! You are a scholar too, I dare say?" said the old man, looking wistfully into the face of the young one.

"I have been tolerably well educated," said Nicholas.

"Fine thing," said the old gentleman; "education a great thing—a very great thing—I never had any. I admire it the more in others. A very fine thing—yes, yes. Tell me more of your history. Let me hear it all. No impertinent curiosity—no, no, no."

There was something so earnest and guileless in the way in which all this was said, and such a complete disregard of all conventional restraints and coldnesses, that Nicholas could not resist it. Among men who have any sound and sterling qualities, there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart. Nicholas took the infection instantly, and ran over the main points of his little history without reserve: merely suppressing names, and touching as lightly as possible upon his uncle's treatment of Kate. The old man listened with great attention, and, when he had concluded, drew his arm eagerly through his own.

"Don't say another word—not another word," said he. "Come along with me. We mustn't lose a minute."

So saying, the old gentleman dragged him back into Oxford Street, and, hailing an omnibus on its way to the City, pushed Nicholas in before him, and followed himself.

As he appeared in a most extraordinary condition of restless excitement, and, whenever Nicholas offered to speak, immediately interposed with—"Don't say another word, my dear sir, on any account—not another word," the young man thought it better to attempt no further interruption. Into the City they journeyed accordingly, without interchanging any conversation; and the farther they went, the more Nicholas wondered what the end of the adventure could possibly be.

The old gentleman got out with great alacrity when they reached the Bank, and, once more taking Nicholas by the arm, hurried him along Threadneedle Street, and through some lanes and passages on the right, until they, at length, emerged in a quiet, shady little square. Into the oldest and cleanest-looking house of business in the square he led the way. The only inscription on the door-post was "Cheeryble Brothers;" but, from a hasty glance at the directions of some packages which were lying about, Nicholas supposed that the brothers Cheeryble were German merchants.

Passing through a warehouse which presented every indication of a thriving business, Mr. Cheeryble (for such Nicholas supposed him to be, from the respect which had been shown him by the warehousemen and porters whom they passed) led him into a little partitioned-off counting-house like a large glass case, in which counting-house there sat—as free from dust and blemish as if he had been fixed into the glass case before the top was put on, and had never come out since—a fat, elderly, large-faced clerk, with silver spectacles and a powdered head.

"Is my brother in his room, Tim?" said Mr. Cheeryble with no less kindness of manner than he had shown to Nicholas.

"Yes, he is, sir," replied the fat clerk, turning his spectacle-glasses towards his principal, and his eyes towards Nicholas, "but Mr. Trimmers is with him."

"Ay! And what has he come about, Tim?" said Mr. Cheeryble.

"He is getting up a subscription for the widow and family of a man who was killed in

the East India Docks this morning, sir," rejoined Tim. "Smashed, sir, by a cask of sugar."

"He is a good creature," said Mr. Cheeryble with great earnestness. "He is a kind soul. I am very much obliged to Trimmers. Trimmers is one of the best friends we have. He makes a thousand cases known to us that we should never discover of ourselves. I am *very* much obliged to Trimmers." Saying which, Mr. Cheeryble rubbed his hands with infinite delight, and Mr. Trimmers happening to pass the door that instant, on his way out, shot out after him, and caught him by the hand.

"I owe you a thousand thanks, Trimmers—ten thousand thanks—I take it very friendly of you—very friendly indeed," said Mr. Cheeryble, dragging him into a corner to get out of hearing. "How many children are there, and what has my brother Ned given, Trimmers?"

"There are six children," replied the gentleman, "and your brother has given us twenty pounds."

"My brother Ned is a good fellow, and you're a good fellow too, Trimmers," said the old man, shaking him by both hands with trembling eagerness. "Put me down for another twenty—or—stop a minute, stop a minute. We mustn't look ostentatious; put me down ten pound, and Tim Linkinwater ten pound. A cheque for twenty pound for Mr. Trimmers, Tim. God bless you, Trimmers—and come and dine with us some day this week; you'll always find a knife and fork, and we shall be delighted. Now, my dear sir—cheque from Mr. Linkinwater, Tim. Smashed by a cask of sugar, and six poor children—oh dear, dear, dear!"

Talking on in this strain, as fast as he could, to prevent any friendly remonstrances from the collector of the subscription on the large amount of his donation, Mr. Cheeryble led Nicholas, equally astonished and affected by what he had seen and heard in this short space, to the half-opened door of another room.

"Brother Ned," said Mr. Cheeryble, tapping with his knuckles, and stooping to listen, "are you busy, my dear brother, or can you spare time for a word or two with me?"

"Brother Charles, my dear fellow," replied a voice from the inside, so like in its tones to that which had just spoken, that Nicholas started, and almost thought it was the same, "don't ask me such a question, but come in directly."

They went in without further parley. What was the amazement of Nicholas when his conductor advanced, and exchanged a warm greeting with another old gentleman, the very type and model of himself—the same face, the same figure, the same coat, waistcoat, and neckcloth, the same breeches and gaiters—nay, there was the very same white hat hanging against the wall!

As they shook each other by the hand: the face of each lighted up by beaming looks of affection, which would have been most delightful to behold in infants, and which, in men so old, was inexpressibly touching: Nicholas could observe that the last old gentleman was something stouter than his brother; this, and a slight additional shade of clumsiness in his gait and stature, formed the only perceptible difference between them. Nobody could have doubted their being twin brothers.

"Brother Ned," said Nicholas's friend, closing the room-door, "here is a young friend of mine whom we must assist. We must make proper inquiries into his statements, in justice to him as well as to ourselves, and if they are confirmed—as I feel assured they will be—we must assist him, we must assist him, brother Ned."

"It is enough, my dear brother, that you say we should," returned the other. "When you say that, no further inquiries are needed. He *shall* be assisted. What are his necessities, and what does he require? Where is Tim Linkinwater? Let us have him here."

Both the brothers, it may be here remarked, had a very emphatic and earnest delivery; both had lost nearly the same teeth, which imparted the same peculiarity to their speech; and both spoke as if, besides possessing the utmost serenity of mind that the kindliest and most unsuspecting nature could bestow, they had, in collecting the plums from Fortune's choicest pudding, retained a few for present use, and kept them in their mouths.

"Where is Tim Linkinwater?" said brother Ned.

"Stop, stop, stop!" said brother Charles, taking the other aside. "I've a plan, my dear brother, I've a plan. Tim is getting old, and Tim has been a faithful servant, brother Ned; and I don't think pensioning Tim's mother and sister, and buying a little tomb for the family when his poor brother died, was a sufficient recompense for his faithful services."

"No, no, no," replied the other. "Certainly not. Not half enough, not half."

"If we could lighten Tim's duties," said the old gentleman, "and prevail upon him to go into the country now and then, and sleep in the fresh air, besides, two or three times a week (which he could, if he began business an hour later in the morning), old Tim Linkinwater

would grow young again in time; and he's three good years our senior now. Old Tim Linkinwater young again! Eh, brother Ned, eh? Why, I recollect old Tim Linkinwater quite a little boy, don't you? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Tim, poor Tim!"

And the fine old fellows laughed pleasantly together: each with a tear of regard for old Tim Linkinwater standing in his eye.

"But hear this first—hear this first, brother Ned," said the old man hastily, placing two chairs, one on each side of Nicholas. "I'll tell it you myself, brother Ned, because the young gentleman is modest, and is a scholar, Ned, and I shouldn't feel it right that he should tell us his story over and over again as if he was a beggar, or as if we doubted him. No, no, no."

"No, no, no," returned the other, nodding his head gravely. "Very right, my dear brother, very right."

"He will tell me I'm wrong, if I make a mistake," said Nicholas's friend. "But, whether I do or not, you'll be very much affected, brother Ned, remembering the time when we were two friendless lads, and earned our first shilling in this great city."

The twins pressed each other's hands in silence; and, in his own homely manner, brother Charles related the particulars he had heard from Nicholas. The conversation which ensued was a long one, and, when it was over, a secret conference of almost equal duration took place between brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater in another room. It is no disparagement to Nicholas to say that, before he had been closeted with the two brothers ten minutes, he could only wave his hand at every fresh expression of kindness and sympathy, and sob like a little child.

At length brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater came back together, when Tim instantly walked up to Nicholas, and whispered in his ear, in a very brief sentence (for Tim was ordinarily a man of few words), that he had taken down the address in the Strand, and would call upon him that evening at eight. Having done which, Tim wiped his spectacles and put them on, preparatory to hearing what more the brothers Cheeryble had got to say.

"Tim," said brother Charles, "you understand that we have an intention of taking this young gentleman into the counting-house?"

Brother Ned remarked that Tim was aware of that intention, and quite approved of it; and Tim having nodded, and said he did, drew himself up, and looked particularly fat, and very important. After which there was a profound silence.

"I'm not coming an hour later in the morning, you know," said Tim, breaking out all at once, and looking very resolute. "I'm not going to sleep in the fresh air—no, nor I'm not going into the country either. A pretty thing at this time of day, certainly. Pho!"

"Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater!" said brother Charles, looking at him without the faintest spark of anger, and with a countenance radiant with attachment to the old clerk. "Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater, what do you mean, sir?"

"It's forty-four year," said Tim, making a calculation in the air with his pen, and drawing an imaginary line before he cast it up, "forty-four year, next May, since I first kept the books of Cheeryble Brothers. I've opened the safe every morning all that time (Sundays excepted) as the clock struck nine, and gone over the house every night at half-past ten (except on Foreign Post nights, and then twenty minutes before twelve) to see the doors fastened, and the fires out. I've never slept out of the back-attic one single night. There's the same mignonette box in the middle of the window, and the same four flower-pots, two on each side, that I brought with me when I first came. There an't—I've said it again and again, and I'll maintain it—there an't such a square as this in the world. I *know* there an't," said Tim with sudden energy, and looking sternly about him. "Not one. For business or pleasure, in summer-time or winter—I don't care which—there's nothing like it. There's not such a spring in England as the pump under the archway. There's not such a view in England as the view out of my window; I've seen it every morning before I shaved, and I ought to know something about it. I have slept in that room," added Tim, sinking his voice a little, "for four-and-forty year; and if it wasn't inconvenient, and didn't interfere with business, I should request leave to die there."

"Damn you, Tim Linkinwater, how dare you talk about dying?" roared the twins by one impulse, and blowing their old noses violently.

"That's what I've got to say, Mr. Edwin and Mr. Charles," said Tim, squaring his shoulders again. "This isn't the first time you've talked about superannuating me; but, if you please, we'll make it the last, and drop the subject for evermore."

With these words, Tim Linkinwater stalked out, and shut himself up in his glass case, with

the air of a man who had had his say, and was thoroughly resolved not to be put down.

The brothers interchanged looks, and coughed some half-dozen times without speaking.

"He must be done something with, brother Ned," said the other warmly; "we must disregard his old scruples; they can't be tolerated, or borne. He must be made a partner, brother Ned; and, if he won't submit to it peaceably, we must have recourse to violence."

"Quite right," replied brother Ned, nodding his head as a man thoroughly determined; "quite right, my dear brother. If he won't listen to reason, we must do it against his will, and show him that we are determined to exert our authority. We must quarrel with him, brother Charles."

"We must—we certainly must have a quarrel with Tim Linkinwater," said the other. "But in the meantime, my dear brother, we are keeping our young friend; and the poor lady and her daughter will be anxious for his return. So let us say good-bye for the present, and—there, there—take care of that box, my dear sir—and—no, no, not a word now; but be careful of the crossings and——"

And, with any disjointed and unconnected words which would prevent Nicholas from pouring forth his thanks, the brothers hurried him out: shaking hands with him all the way, and affecting very unsuccessfully—they were poor hands at deception! — to be wholly unconscious of the feelings that completely mastered him.

Nicholas's heart was too full to allow of his turning into the street until he had recovered some composure. When he at last glided out of the dark doorway corner in which he had been compelled to halt, he caught a glimpse of the twins stealthily peeping in at one corner of the glass case, evidently undecided whether they should follow up their late attack without delay, or for the present postpone laying further siege to the inflexible Tim Linkinwater.

To recount all the delight and wonder which the circumstances just detailed awakened at Miss La Creevy's, and all the things that were done, said, thought, expected, hoped, and prophesied in consequence, is beside the present course and purpose of these adventures. It is sufficient to state, in brief, that Mr. Timothy Linkinwater arrived, punctual to his appointment; that, oddity as he was, and jealous, as he was bound to be, of the proper exercise of his employers' most comprehensive liberality, he reported strongly and warmly in favour of Nicholas; and that, next day, he was appointed to the vacant stool in the counting-house of Cheeryble Brothers, with a present salary of one hundred and twenty pounds a year.

"And I think, my dear brother," said Nicholas's first friend, "that if we were to let them that little cottage at Bow which is empty, at something under the usual rent, now—eh, brother Ned?"

"For nothing at all," said brother Ned. "We are rich, and should be ashamed to touch the rent under such circumstances as these. Where is Tim Linkinwater?—For nothing at all, my dear brother, for nothing at all."

"Perhaps it would be better to say something, brother Ned," suggested the other mildly; "it would help to preserve habits of frugality, you know, and remove any painful sense of overwhelming obligations. We might say fifteen pound, or twenty pound, and, if it was punctually paid, make it up to them in some other way. And I might secretly advance a small loan towards a little furniture, and you might secretly advance another small loan, brother Ned; and if we find them doing well—as we shall; there's no fear, no fear—we can change the loans into gifts—carefully, brother Ned, and by degrees, and without pressing upon them too much; what do you say now, brother?"

Brother Ned gave his hand upon it, and not only said it should be done, but had it done too; and, in one short week, Nicholas took possession of the stool, and Mrs. Nickleby and Kate took possession of the house, and all was hope, bustle, and light-heartedness.

There surely never was such a week of discoveries and surprises as the first week of that cottage. Every night, when Nicholas came home, something new had been found out. One day it was a grape-vine, and another day it was a boiler, and another day it was the key of the front-parlour closet at the bottom of the water-butt, and so on through a hundred items. Then, this room was embellished with a muslin curtain, and that room was rendered quite elegant by a window blind, and such improvements were made as no one would have supposed possible. Then there was Miss La Creevy, who had come out in the omnibus to stop a day or two and help, and who was perpetually losing a very small brown-paper parcel of tin-tacks and a very large hammer, and running about with her sleeves tucked up at the wrists, and falling off pairs of steps and hurting herself very much—and Mrs. Nickleby, who talked incessantly, and did something now and then, but not often—and Kate, who busied herself noiselessly everywhere, and was pleased with everything—and

Smike, who made the garden a perfect wonder to look upon—and Nicholas, who helped and encouraged them every one—all the peace and cheerfulness of home restored, with such new zest imparted to every frugal pleasure, and such delight to every hour of meeting, as misfortune and separation alone could give!

In short, the poor Nicklebys were social and happy; while the rich Nickleby was alone and miserable.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL; RELATING TO FAMILY MATTERS. SHOWING HOW MR. KENWIGS UNDERWENT VIOLENT AGITATION, AND HOW MRS. KENWIGS WAS AS WELL AS COULD BE EXPECTED.

IT might have been seven o'clock in the evening, and it was growing dark in the narrow streets near Golden Square, when Mr. Kenwigs sent out for a pair of the cheapest white

"I'M NOT COMING AN HOUR LATER IN THE MORNING, YOU KNOW," SAID TIM, BREAKING OUT ALL AT ONCE, AND LOOKING VERY RESOLUTE. "I'M NOT GOING TO SLEEP IN THE FRESH AIR—NO, NOR I'M NOT GOING INTO THE COUNTRY EITHER," ETC.

kid gloves—those at fourteen-pence—and selecting the strongest, which happened to be the right-hand one, walked down-stairs with an air of pomp and much excitement, and proceeded to muffle the knob of the street-door knocker therein. Having executed this task with great nicety, Mr. Kenwigs pulled the door to after him, and just stepped across the road to try the effect from the opposite side of the street. Satisfied that nothing could possibly look better in its way, Mr. Kenwigs then stepped back again, and, calling through the keyhole to Morleena to open the door, vanished into the house, and was seen no longer.

Now, considered as an abstract circumstance, there was no more obvious cause or reason why Mr. Kenwigs should take the trouble of muffling this particular knocker than there would have been for his muffling the knocker of any nobleman or gentleman resident ten miles off; because,

for the greater convenience of the numerous lodgers, the street-door always stood wide open, and the knocker was never used at all. The first floor, the second floor, and the third floor had each a bell of its own. As to the attics, no one ever called on them; if anybody wanted the parlours, they were close at hand, and all he had to do was to walk straight into them; while the kitchen had a separate entrance down the area steps. As a question of mere necessity and usefulness, therefore, this muffling of the knocker was thoroughly incomprehensible.

But knockers may be muffled for other purposes than those of mere utilitarianism, as, in the present instance, was clearly shown. There are certain polite forms and ceremonies which must be observed in civilised life, or mankind relapse into their original barbarism. No genteel lady was ever yet confined—indeed, no genteel confinement can possibly take place—without the accompanying symbol of a muffled knocker. Mrs. Kenwigs was a lady of some pretensions to gentility; Mrs. Kenwigs was confined. And, therefore, Mr. Kenwigs tied up the silent knocker on the premises in a white kid glove.

"I'm not quite certain, neither," said Mr. Kenwigs, arranging his shirt collar, and walking slowly up-stairs, "whether, as it's a boy, I won't have it in the papers."

Pondering upon the advisability of this step, and the sensation it was likely to create in the neighbourhood, Mr. Kenwigs betook himself to the sitting-room, where various extremely diminutive articles of clothing were airing on a horse before the fire, and Mr. Lumbey, the doctor, was dandling the baby—that is, the old baby—not the new one.

"It's a fine boy, Mr. Kenwigs," said Mr. Lumbey, the doctor.

"You consider him a fine boy, do you, sir?" returned Mr. Kenwigs.

"It's the finest boy I ever saw in all my life," said the doctor. "I never saw such a baby."

It is a pleasant thing to reflect upon, and furnishes a complete answer to those who contend for the gradual degeneration of the human species, that every baby born into the world is a finer one than the last.

"I ne—ver saw such a baby," said Mr. Lumbey, the doctor.

"Morleena was a fine baby," remarked Mr. Kenwigs; as if this were rather an attack, by implication, upon the family.

"They were all fine babies," said Mr. Lumbey. And Mr. Lumbey went on nursing the baby with a thoughtful look. Whether he was considering under what head he could best charge the nursing in the bill was best known to himself.

During this short conversation, Miss Morleena, as the eldest of the family, and natural representative of her mother during her indisposition, had been hustling and slapping the three younger Miss Kenwigses without intermission; which considerate and affectionate conduct brought tears into the eyes of Mr. Kenwigs, and caused him to declare that, in understanding and behaviour, that child was a woman.

"She will be a treasure to the man she marries, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs, half aside; "I think she'll marry above her station, Mr. Lumbey."

"I shouldn't wonder at all," replied the doctor.

"You never see her dance, sir, did you?" asked Mr. Kenwigs.

The doctor shook his head.

"Ay!" said Mr. Kenwigs, as though he pitied him from his heart, "then you don't know what she's capable of."

All this time there had been a great whisking in and out of the other room; the door had been opened and shut very softly about twenty times a minute (for it was necessary to keep Mrs. Kenwigs quiet); and the baby had been exhibited to a score or two of deputations from a select body of female friends, who had assembled in the passage, and about the street-door, to discuss the event in all its bearings. Indeed, the excitement extended itself over the whole street, and groups of ladies might be seen standing at the doors,—some in the interesting condition in which Mrs. Kenwigs had last appeared in public,—relating their experiences of similar occurrences. Some few acquired great credit from having prophesied, the day before yesterday, exactly when it would come to pass; others, again, related how that they guessed what it was, directly they saw Mr. Kenwigs turn pale and run up the street as hard as ever he could go. Some said one thing, and some another; but all talked together, and all agreed upon two points: first, that it was very meritorious and highly praiseworthy in Mrs. Kenwigs to do as she had done; and secondly, that there never was such a skilful and scientific doctor as that Doctor Lumbey.

In the midst of this general hubbub, Doctor Lumbey sat in the first-floor front, as before related, nursing the deposed baby, and talking to Mr. Kenwigs. He was a stout, bluff-looking gentleman, with no shirt collar to speak of, and a beard that had been growing since yesterday morning; for Doctor Lumbey was popular, and

the neighbourhood was prolific; and there had been no less than three other knockers muffled, one after the other, within the last forty-eight hours.

"Well, Mr. Kenwigs," said Doctor Lumbey, "this makes six. You'll have a fine family in time, sir."

"I think six is almost enough, sir," returned Mr. Kenwigs.

"Pooh! pooh!" said the doctor. "Nonsense! not half enough."

With this the doctor laughed; but he didn't laugh half as much as a married friend of Mrs. Kenwigs's, who had just come in from the sick chamber to report progress, and take a small sip of brandy-and-water: and who seemed to consider it one of the best jokes ever launched upon society.

"They're not altogether dependent upon good fortune, neither," said Mr. Kenwigs, taking his second daughter on his knee; "they have expectations."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Lumbey, the doctor.

"And very good ones too, I believe, haven't they?" asked the married lady.

"Why, ma'am," said Mr. Kenwigs, "it's not exactly for me to say what they may be, or what they may not be. It's not for me to boast of any family with which I have the honour to be connected; at the same time, Mrs. Kenwigs's is—— I should say," said Mr. Kenwigs abruptly, and raising his voice as he spoke, "that my children might come into a matter of a hundred pound apiece, perhaps. Perhaps more, but certainly that."

"And a very pretty little fortune," said the married lady.

"There are some relations of Mrs. Kenwigs's," said Mr. Kenwigs, taking a pinch of snuff from the doctor's box, and then sneezing very hard, for he wasn't used to it, "that might leave their hundred pound apiece to ten people, and yet not go begging when they had done it."

"Ah! I know who you mean," observed the married lady, nodding her head.

"I made mention of no names, and I wish to make mention of no names," said Mr. Kenwigs with a portentous look. "Many of my friends have met a relation of Mrs. Kenwigs's in this very room, as would do honour to any company; that's all."

"I've met him," said the married lady, with a glance towards Doctor Lumbey.

"It's naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a father to see such a man as that a kissing and taking notice of my children," pursued Mr. Kenwigs. "It's naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a man to know that man. It will be naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a husband to make that man acquainted with this ewent."

Having delivered his sentiments in this form of words, Mr. Kenwigs arranged his second daughter's flaxen tail, and bade her be a good girl, and mind what her sister, Morleena, said.

"That girl grows more like her mother every day," said Mr. Lumbey, suddenly stricken with an enthusiastic admiration of Morleena.

"There!" rejoined the married lady. "What I always say—what I always did say! She's the very picter of her." Having thus directed the general attention to the young lady in question, the married lady embraced the opportunity of taking another sip of the brandy-and-water—and a pretty long sip too.

"Yes! there is a likeness," said Mr. Kenwigs after some reflection. "But such a woman as Mrs. Kenwigs was afore she was married! Good gracious, such a woman!"

Mr. Lumbey shook his head with great solemnity, as though to imply that he supposed she must have been rather a dazzler.

"Talk of fairies!" cried Mr. Kenwigs. "*I* never see anybody so light to be alive—never. Such manners, too; so playful, and yet so sewerely proper! As for her figure! It isn't generally known," said Mr. Kenwigs, dropping his voice; "but her figure was such, at that time, that the sign of the Britannia, over in the Holloway Road, was painted from it!"

"But only see what it is now," urged the married lady. "Does *she* look like the mother of six?"

"Quite ridiculous," cried the doctor.

"She looks a deal more like her own daughter," said the married lady.

"So she does," assented Mr. Lumbey. "A great deal more."

Mr. Kenwigs was about to make some further observations, most probably in confirmation of this opinion, when another married lady, who had looked in to keep up Mrs. Kenwigs's spirits, and help to clear off anything in the eating and drinking way that might be going about, put in her head to announce that she had just been down to answer the bell, and that there was a gentleman at the door who wanted to see Mr. Kenwigs "most particular."

Shadowy visions of his distinguished relation flitted through the brain of Mr. Kenwigs as this message was delivered; and, under their influence, he dispatched Morleena to show the gentleman up straightway.

"Why, I do declare," said Mr. Kenwigs,

standing opposite the door so as to get the earliest glimpse of the visitor as he came upstairs, "it's Mr. Johnson! How do you find yourself, sir?"

Nicholas shook hands, kissed his old pupils all round, intrusted a large parcel of toys to the guardianship of Morleena, bowed to the doctor and the married ladies, and inquired after Mrs. Kenwigs in a tone of interest, which went to the very heart and soul of the nurse, who had come in to warm some mysterious compound in a little saucepan over the fire.

"I ought to make a hundred apologies to you for calling at such a season," said Nicholas, "but I was not aware of it until I had rung the bell, and my time is so fully occupied now, that I feared it might be some days before I could possibly come again."

"No time like the present, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs. "The sitiwation of Mrs. Kenwigs, sir, is no obstacle to a little conversation between you and me, I hope?"

"You are very good," said Nicholas.

At this juncture, proclamation was made by another married lady that the baby had begun to eat like anything; whereupon the two married ladies, already mentioned, rushed tumultuously into the bedroom to behold him in the act.

"The fact is," resumed Nicholas, "that, before I left the country, where I have been for some time past, I undertook to deliver a message to you."

"Ay, ay?" said Mr. Kenwigs.

"And I have been," added Nicholas, "already in town for some days, without having had an opportunity of doing so."

"It's no matter, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs. "I dare say it's none the worse for keeping cold. Message from the country!" said Mr. Kenwigs, ruminating; "that's curious. I don't know anybody in the country."

"Miss Petowker," suggested Nicholas.

"Oh! from her, is it?" said Mr. Kenwigs. "Oh dear, yes! Ah! Mrs. Kenwigs will be glad to hear from her. Henrietta Petowker, eh? How odd things come about, now! That you should have met her in the country! Well!"

Hearing this mention of their old friend's name, the four Miss Kenwigses gathered round Nicholas, open eyed and mouthed, to hear more. Mr. Kenwigs looked a little curious too, but quite comfortable and unsuspecting.

"The message relates to family matters," said Nicholas, hesitating.

"Oh! never mind," said Kenwigs, glancing at Mr. Lumbey, who, having rashly taken charge of little Lillyvick, found nobody disposed to relieve him of his precious burden. "All friends here."

Nicholas hemmed once or twice, and seemed to have some difficulty in proceeding.

"At Portsmouth Henrietta Petowker is," observed Mr. Kenwigs.

"Yes," said Nicholas; "Mr. Lillyvick is there."

Mr. Kenwigs turned pale, but he recovered, and said *that* was an odd coincidence also.

"The message is from him," said Nicholas.

Mr. Kenwigs appeared to revive. He knew that his niece was in a delicate state, and had, no doubt, sent word that they were to forward full particulars. Yes. That was very kind of him—so like him, too!

"He desired me to give his kindest love," said Nicholas.

"Very much obliged to him, I'm sure. Your great-uncle, Lillyvick, my dears!" interposed Mr. Kenwigs, condescendingly explaining it to the children.

"His kindest love," resumed Nicholas; "and to say that he had no time to write, but that he was married to Miss Petowker."

Mr. Kenwigs started from his seat with a petrified stare, caught his second daughter by her flaxen tail, and covered his face with his pocket-handkerchief. Morleena fell, all stiff and rigid, into the baby's chair, as she had seen her mother fall when she fainted away, and the two remaining little Kenwigses shrieked in affright.

"My children, my defrauded, swindled infants!" cried Mr. Kenwigs, pulling so hard, in his vehemence, at the flaxen tail of his second daughter, that he lifted her up on tiptoe, and kept her, for some seconds, in that attitude. "Villain, ass, traitor!"

"Drat the man!" cried the nurse, looking angrily around. "What does he mean by making that noise here?"

"Silence, woman!" said Mr. Kenwigs fiercely.

"I won't be silent," returned the nurse. "Be silent yourself, you wretch! Have you no regard for your baby?"

"No!" returned Mr. Kenwigs.

"More shame for you," retorted the nurse. "Ugh! you unnatural monster!"

"Let him die!" cried Mr. Kenwigs in the torrent of his wrath. "Let him die! He has no expectations, no property to come into. We want no babies here," said Mr. Kenwigs recklessly. "Take 'em away, take 'em away to the Foundling!"

With these awful remarks, Mr. Kenwigs sat himself down in a chair, and defied the nurse, who made the best of her way into the adjoining

room, and returned with a stream of matrons: declaring that Mr. Kenwigs had spoken blasphemy against his family, and must be raving mad.

Appearances were certainly not in Mr. Kenwigs's favour, for the exertion of speaking with so much vehemence, and yet in such a tone as should prevent his lamentations reaching the ears of Mrs. Kenwigs, had made him very black in the face; besides which, the excitement of the occasion, and an unwonted indulgence in various strong cordials to celebrate it, had swollen and dilated his features to a most unusual extent. But, Nicholas and the doctor—who had been passive at first, doubting very much whether Mr. Kenwigs could be in earnest—interfering to explain the immediate cause of his condition, the indignation of the matrons was changed to pity, and they implored him, with much feeling, to go quietly to bed.

"The attention," said Mr. Kenwigs, looking around with a plaintive air, "the attention that I've shown to that man! The hyseters he has eat, and the pints of ale he has drank, in this house——!"

"WITH THIS THE DOCTOR LAUGHED; BUT HE DIDN'T LAUGH HALF AS MUCH AS A MARRIED FRIEND OF MRS. KENWIGS'S, WHO HAD JUST COME IN FROM THE SICK CHAMBER," ETC.

"It's very trying, and very hard to bear, we know," said one of the married ladies; "but think of your dear darling wife."

"Oh yes, and what she's been a undergoing of, only this day!" cried a great many voices. "There's a good man, do."

"The presents that have been made to him," said Mr. Kenwigs, reverting to his calamity, "the pipes, the snuff-boxes—a pair of india-rubber goloshes, that cost six-and-six——"

"Ah! it won't bear thinking of, indeed," cried the matrons generally; "but it'll all come home to him, never fear."

Mr. Kenwigs looked darkly upon the ladies, as if he would prefer it all coming home to *him*, as there was nothing to be got by it; but he said nothing, and, resting his head upon his hand, subsided into a kind of doze.

Then, the matrons again expatiated on the expediency of taking the good gentleman to bed; observing that he would be better to-morrow, and that they knew what was the wear and tear of some men's minds when their wives were taken as Mrs. Kenwigs had been that day, and that it did him great credit, and there was nothing to be ashamed of in it; far from it;

they liked to see it, they did, for it showed a good heart. And one lady observed, as a case bearing upon the present, that her husband was often quite light-headed from anxiety on similar occasions, and that once, when her little Johnny was born, it was nearly a week before he came to himself again, during the whole of which time he did nothing but cry, "Is it a boy, is it a boy?" in a manner which went to the hearts of all his hearers.

At length, Morleena (who quite forgot she had fainted, when she found she was not noticed) announced that a chamber was ready for her afflicted parent; and Mr. Kenwigs, having partially smothered his four daughters in the closeness of his embrace, accepted the doctor's arm on one side, and the support of Nicholas on the other, and was conducted up-stairs to a bedroom which had been secured for the occasion.

Having seen him sound asleep, and heard him snore most satisfactorily, and having further presided over the distribution of the toys, to the perfect contentment of all the little Kenwigses, Nicholas took his leave. The matrons dropped off one by one, with the exception of six or eight particular friends, who had determined to stop all night; the lights in the houses gradually disappeared; the last bulletin was issued that Mrs. Kenwigs was as well as could be expected; and the whole family were left to their repose.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NICHOLAS FINDS FURTHER FAVOUR IN THE EYES OF THE BROTHERS CHEERYBLE AND MR. TIMOTHY LINKINWATER. THE BROTHERS GIVE A BANQUET ON A GREAT ANNUAL OCCASION. NICHOLAS, ON RETURNING HOME FROM IT, RECEIVES A MYSTERIOUS AND IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE FROM THE LIPS OF MRS. NICKLEBY.

THE Square in which the counting-house of the brothers Cheeryble was situated, although it might not wholly realise the very sanguine expectations which a stranger would be disposed to form on hearing the fervent encomiums bestowed upon it by Tim Linkinwater, was, nevertheless, a sufficiently desirable nook in the heart of a busy town like London, and one which occupied a high place in the affectionate remembrances of several grave persons domiciled in the neighbourhood, whose recollections, however, dated from a much more recent period, and whose attachment to the spot was far less absorbing, than were the recollections and attachment of the enthusiastic Tim.

And let not those whose eyes have been accustomed to the aristocratic gravity of Grosvenor Square and Hanover Square, the dowager barrenness and frigidity of Fitzroy Square, or the gravel-walks and garden seats of the Squares of Russell and Euston, suppose that the affections of Tim Linkinwater, or the inferior lovers of this particular locality, had been awakened and kept alive by any refreshing associations with leaves, however dingy, or grass, however bare and thin. The City square has no enclosure, save the lamp-post in the middle; and no grass but the weeds which spring up round its base. It is a quiet, little-frequented, retired spot, favourable to melancholy and contemplation, and appointments of long-waiting; and up and down its every side the Appointed saunters idly by the hour together, wakening the echoes with the monotonous sound of his footsteps on the smooth worn stones, and counting, first the windows, and then the very bricks of the tall silent houses that hem him round about. In winter-time the snow will linger there long after it has melted from the busy streets and highways. The summer's sun holds it in some respect, and, while he darts his cheerful rays sparingly into the square, keeps his fiery heat and glare for noisier and less-imposing precincts. It is so quiet, that you can almost hear the ticking of your own watch when you stop to cool in its refreshing atmosphere. There is a distant hum—of coaches, not of insects—but no other sound disturbs the stillness of the square. The ticket porter leans idly against the post at the corner: comfortably warm, but not hot, although the day is broiling. His white apron flaps languidly in the air, his head gradually droops upon his breast, he takes very long winks with both eyes at once; even he is unable to withstand the soporific influence of the place, and is gradually falling asleep. But now he starts into full wakefulness, recoils a step or two, and gazes out before him with eager wildness in his eye. Is it a job, or a boy at marbles? Does he see a ghost, or hear an organ? No; sight more unwonted still—there is a butterfly in the square—a real, live butterfly! astray from flowers and sweets, and fluttering among the iron heads of the dusty area railings.

But if there were not many matters immediately without the doors of Cheeryble Brothers to engage the attention or distract the thoughts of the young clerk, there were not a few within to interest and amuse him. There was scarcely an object in the place, animate or inanimate,

which did not partake in some degree of the scrupulous method and punctuality of Mr. Timothy Linkinwater. Punctual as the counting-house dial, which he maintained to be the best time-keeper in London next after the clock of some old, hidden, unknown church hard by, (for Tim held the fabled goodness of that at the Horse Guards to be a pleasant fiction, invented by jealous West-enders,) the old clerk performed the minutest actions of the day, and arranged the minutest articles in the little room, in a precise and regular order, which could not have been exceeded if it had actually been a real glass case, fitted with the choicest curiosities. Paper, pens, ink, ruler, sealing-wax, wafers, pounce-box, string-box, fire-box, Tim's hat, Tim's scrupulously-folded gloves, Tim's other coat—looking precisely like a back view of himself as it hung against the wall—all had their accustomed inches of space. Except the clock, there was not such an accurate and unimpeachable instrument in existence as the little thermometer which hung behind the door. There was not a bird of such methodical and business-like habits in all the world as the blind blackbird, who dreamed and dozed away his days in a large snug cage, and had lost his voice, from old age, years before Tim first bought him. There was not such an eventful story in the whole range of anecdote as Tim could tell concerning the acquisition of that very bird; how, compassionating his starved and suffering condition, he had purchased him with the view of humanely terminating his wretched life; how he determined to wait three days, and see whether the bird revived; how, before half the time was out, the bird did revive; and how he went on reviving and picking up his appetite and good looks until he gradually became what—"what you see him now, sir," Tim would say, glancing proudly at the cage. And, with that, Tim would utter a melodious chirrup, and cry "Dick;" and Dick, who, for any sign of life he had previously given, might have been a wooden or stuffed representation of a blackbird indifferently executed, would come to the side of the cage in three small jumps, and, thrusting his bill between the bars, turn his sightless head towards his old master—and at that moment it would be very difficult to determine which of the two was the happier, the bird or Tim Linkinwater.

Nor was this all. Everything gave back, besides, some reflection of the kindly spirit of the brothers. The warehousemen and porters were such sturdy, jolly fellows, that it was a treat to see them. Among the shipping announcements and steam-packet lists which decorated the counting-house wall were designs for almshouses, statements of charities, and plans for new hospitals. A blunderbuss and two swords hung above the chimney-piece, for the terror of evil-doers, but the blunderbuss was rusty and shattered, and the swords were broken and edgeless. Elsewhere, their open display in such a condition would have raised a smile; but, there, it seemed as though even violent and offensive weapons partook of the reigning influence, and became emblems of mercy and forbearance.

Such thoughts as these occurred to Nicholas very strongly on the morning when he first took possession of the vacant stool, and looked about him, more freely and at ease than he had before enjoyed an opportunity of doing. Perhaps they encouraged and stimulated him to exertion, for, during the next two weeks, all his spare hours, late at night and early in the morning, were incessantly devoted to acquiring the mysteries of book-keeping and some other forms of mercantile account. To these he applied himself with such steadiness and perseverance, that, although he brought no greater amount of previous knowledge to the subject than certain dim recollections of two or three very long sums entered into a ciphering book at school, and relieved for parental inspection by the effigy of a fat swan tastefully flourished by the writing-master's own hand, he found himself, at the end of a fortnight, in a condition to report his proficiency to Mr. Linkinwater, and to claim his promise that he, Nicholas Nickleby, should now be allowed to assist him in his graver labours.

It was a sight to behold Tim Linkinwater slowly bring out a massive ledger and day-book, and, after turning them over and over, and affectionately dusting their backs and sides, open the leaves here and there, and cast his eyes, half mournfully, half proudly, upon the fair and unblotted entries.

"Four-and-forty year, next May!" said Tim. "Many new ledgers since then. Four-and-forty year!"

Tim closed the book again.

"Come, come," said Nicholas, "I am all impatience to begin."

Tim Linkinwater shook his head with an air of mild reproof. Mr. Nickleby was not sufficiently impressed with the deep and awful nature of his undertaking. Suppose there should be any mistake—any scratching out!

Young men are adventurous. It is extraordinary what they will rush upon, sometimes. Without even taking the precaution of sitting

himself down upon his stool, but standing leisurely at the desk, and with a smile upon his face—actually a smile; (there was no mistake about it; Mr. Linkinwater often mentioned it afterwards;)—Nicholas dipped his pen into the inkstand before him, and plunged into the books of Cheeryble Brothers!

Tim Linkinwater turned pale, and, tilting up his stool on the two legs nearest Nicholas, looked over his shoulder in breathless anxiety. Brother Charles and brother Ned entered the counting-house together; but Tim Linkinwater, without looking round, impatiently waved his hand as a caution that profound silence must be observed, and followed the nib of the inexperienced pen with strained and eager eyes.

The brothers looked on with smiling faces, but Tim Linkinwater smiled not, nor moved for some minutes. At length he drew a long slow breath, and, still maintaining his position on the tilted stool, glanced at brother Charles, secretly pointed with the feather of his pen towards Nicholas, and nodded his head in a grave and resolute manner, plainly signifying, "He'll do."

Brother Charles nodded again, and exchanged a laughing look with brother Ned; but, just then, Nicholas stopped to refer to some other page, and Tim Linkinwater, unable to contain his satisfaction any longer, descended from his stool, and caught him rapturously by the hand.

"He has done it!" said Tim, looking round at his employers, and shaking his head triumphantly. "His capital B's and D's are exactly like mine; he dots all his small i's, and crosses every t as he writes it. There an't such a young man as this in all London," said Tim, clapping Nicholas on the back; "not one. Don't tell me! The City can't produce his equal. I challenge the City to do it!"

With this casting down of his gauntlet, Tim Linkinwater struck the desk such a blow with his clenched fist, that the old blackbird tumbled off his perch with the start it gave him, and actually uttered a feeble croak, in the extremity of his astonishment.

"Well said, Tim—well said, Tim Linkinwater!" cried brother Charles, scarcely less pleased than Tim himself, and clapping his hands gently as he spoke. "I knew our young friend would take great pains, and I was quite certain he would succeed in no time. Didn't I say so, brother Ned?"

"You did, my dear brother—certainly, my dear brother, you said so, and you were quite right," replied Ned. "Quite right. Tim Linkinwater is excited, but he is justly excited, properly excited. Tim is a fine fellow. Tim Linkinwater, sir—you're a fine fellow."

"Here's a pleasant thing to think of!" said Tim, wholly regardless of this address to himself, and raising his spectacles from the ledger to the brothers. "Here's a pleasant thing! Do you suppose I haven't often thought of what would become of these books when I was gone? Do you suppose I haven't often thought that things might go on irregular and untidy here after I was taken away? But now," said Tim, extending his forefinger towards Nicholas, "now, when I've shown him a little more, I'm satisfied. The business will go on, when I'm dead, as well as it did when I was alive—just the same; and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that there never were such books—never were such books! No, nor never will be such books—as the books of Cheeryble Brothers."

Having thus expressed his sentiments, Mr. Linkinwater gave vent to a short laugh, indicative of defiance to the cities of London and Westminster, and, turning again to his desk, quietly carried seventy-six from the last column he had added up, and went on with his work.

"Tim Linkinwater, sir," said brother Charles, "give me your hand, sir. This is your birthday. How dare you talk about anything else till you have been wished many happy returns of the day, Tim Linkinwater? God bless you, Tim! God bless you!"

"My dear brother," said the other, seizing Tim's disengaged fist, "Tim Linkinwater looks ten years younger than he did on his last birthday."

"Brother Ned, my dear boy," returned the other old fellow, "I believe that Tim Linkinwater was born a hundred and fifty years old, and is gradually coming down to five-and-twenty; for he's younger every birthday than he was the year before."

"So he is, brother Charles, so he is," replied brother Ned. "There's not a doubt about it."

"Remember, Tim," said brother Charles, "that we dine at half-past five to-day instead of two o'clock; we always depart from our usual custom on this anniversary, as you very well know, Tim Linkinwater. Mr. Nickleby, my dear sir, you will make one. Tim Linkinwater, give me your snuff-box as a remembrance to brother Charles and myself of an attached and faithful rascal, and take that in exchange, as a feeble mark of our respect and esteem, and don't open it until you go to bed, and never say another word upon the subject, or I'll kill the blackbird. A dog! He should have had a golden cage half-a-dozen years ago, if it would have made

him or his master a bit the happier. Now, brother Ned, my dear fellow, I'm ready. At half-past five, remember, Mr. Nickleby! Tim Linkinwater, sir, take care of Mr. Nickleby at half-past five. Now, brother Ned."

Chattering away thus, according to custom, to prevent the possibility of any thanks or acknowledgment being expressed on the other side, the twins trotted off arm-in-arm; having endowed Tim Linkinwater with a costly gold snuff-box, enclosing a bank note worth more than its value ten times told.

At a quarter past five o'clock, punctual to the minute, arrived, according to annual usage, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and a great to-do there was, between Tim Linkinwater's sister and the old housekeeper, respecting Tim Linkinwater's sister's cap, which had been dispatched, per boy, from the house of the family where Tim Linkinwater's sister boarded, and had not yet come to hand: notwithstanding that it had been packed up in a bandbox, and the bandbox in a handkerchief, and the handkerchief tied on to the boy's arm; and notwithstanding, too, that the place of its consignment had been duly set forth, at full length, on the back of an old letter, and the boy enjoined, under pain of divers horrible penalties, the full extent of which the eye of man could not foresee, to deliver the same with all possible speed, and not to loiter by the way. Tim Linkinwater's sister lamented; the housekeeper condoled; and both kept thrusting their heads out of the second-floor window to see if the boy was "coming"—which would have been highly satisfactory, and, upon the whole, tantamount to his being come, as the distance to the corner was not quite five yards—when, all of a sudden, and when he was least expected, the messenger, carrying the bandbox with elaborate caution, appeared in an exactly opposite direction, puffing and panting for breath, and flushed with recent exercise; as well he might be; for he had taken the air, in the first instance, behind a hackney coach that went to Camberwell, and had followed two Punches afterwards, and had seen the Stilts home to their own door. The cap was all safe, however—that was one comfort—and it was no use scolding him—that was another; so the boy went upon his way rejoicing, and Tim Linkinwater's sister presented herself to the company below-stairs, just five minutes after the half-hour had struck by Tim Linkinwater's own infallible clock.

The company consisted of the brothers Cheeryble, Tim Linkinwater, a ruddy-faced white-headed friend of Tim's (who was a superannuated bank clerk), and Nicholas, who was presented to Tim Linkinwater's sister with much gravity and solemnity. The party being now completed, brother Ned rang for dinner, and, dinner being shortly afterwards announced, led Tim Linkinwater's sister into the next room, where it was set forth with great preparation. Then, brother Ned took the head of the table, and brother Charles the foot; and Tim Linkinwater's sister sat on the left hand of brother Ned, and Tim Linkinwater himself on his right: and an ancient butler of apoplectic appearance, and with very short legs, took up his position at the back of brother Ned's arm-chair, and, waving his right arm preparatory to taking off the covers with a flourish, stood bolt upright and motionless.

"For these and all other blessings, brother Charles," said Ned.

"Lord, make us truly thankful, brother Ned," said Charles.

Whereupon the apoplectic butler whisked off the top of the soup-tureen, and shot, all at once, into a state of violent activity.

There was abundance of conversation, and little fear of its ever flagging, for the good-humour of the glorious old twins drew everybody out, and Tim Linkinwater's sister went off into a long and circumstantial account of Tim Linkinwater's infancy, immediately after the very first glass of champagne—taking care to premise that she was very much Tim's junior, and had only become acquainted with the facts from their being preserved and handed down in the family. This history concluded, brother Ned related how that, exactly thirty-five years ago, Tim Linkinwater was suspected to have received a love letter, and how that vague information had been brought to the counting-house of his having been seen walking down Cheapside with an uncommonly handsome spinster; at which there was a roar of laughter, and Tim Linkinwater being charged with blushing, and called upon to explain, denied that the accusation was true; and further, that there would have been any harm in it if it had been; which last position occasioned the superannuated bank clerk to laugh tremendously, and to declare that it was the very best thing he had ever heard in his life, and that Tim Linkinwater might say a great many things before he said anything which would beat *that*.

There was one little ceremony peculiar to the day, both the matter and manner of which made a very strong impression upon Nicholas. The cloth having been removed, and the decanters sent round for the first time, a profound

silence succeeded, and in the cheerful faces of the brothers there appeared an expression, not of absolute melancholy, but of quiet thoughtfulness very unusual at a festive table. As Nicholas, struck by this sudden alteration, was wondering what it could portend, the brothers rose together, and the one at the top of the table leaning forward towards the other, and speaking in a low voice as if he were addressing him individually, said:

"Brother Charles, my dear fellow, there is another association connected with this day which must never be forgotten, and never can be forgotten by you and me. This day, which brought into the world a most faithful and excellent and exemplary fellow, took from it the kindest and very best of parents—the very best of parents to us both. I wish that she could have seen us in our prosperity, and shared it, and had the happiness of knowing how dearly we loved her in it, as we did when we were two poor boys—but that was not to be. My dear brother—The Memory of our Mother."

"Good God!" thought Nicholas, "and there are scores of people of their own station, knowing all this, and twenty thousand times more, who wouldn't ask these men to dinner because they eat with their knives, and never went to school!"

But there was no time to moralise, for the joviality again became very brisk, and the decanter of port being nearly out, brother Ned pulled the bell, which was instantly answered by the apoplectic butler.

"David," said brother Ned.

"Sir," replied the butler.

"A magnum of the double-diamond, David, to drink the health of Mr. Linkinwater."

Instantly, by a feat of dexterity which was the admiration of all the company, and had been, annually, for some years past, the apoplectic butler, bringing his left hand from behind the small of his back, produced the bottle, with the cork-screw already inserted; uncorked it at a jerk; and placed the magnum and the cork before his master with the dignity of conscious cleverness.

"Ha!" said brother Ned, first examining the cork and afterwards filling his glass, while the old butler looked complacently and amiably on, as if it were all his own property, but the company were quite welcome to make free with it, "this looks well, David."

"It ought to, sir," replied David. "You'd be troubled to find such a glass of wine as is our double-diamond, and that Mr. Linkinwater knows very well. That was laid down when Mr. Linkinwater first come: that wine was, gentlemen."

"Nay, David, nay," interposed brother Charles.

"I wrote the entry in the cellar book myself, sir, *if* you please," said David in the tone of a man quite confident in the strength of his facts. "Mr. Linkinwater had only been here twenty year, sir, when that pipe of double-diamond was laid down."

"David is quite right—quite right, brother Charles," said Ned. "Are the people here, David?"

"Outside the door, sir," replied the butler.

"Show 'em in, David, show 'em in."

At this bidding, the old butler placed before his master a small tray of clean glasses, and, opening the door, admitted the jolly porters and warehousemen whom Nicholas had seen below. They were four in all, and as they came in, bowing, and grinning, and blushing, the housekeeper, and cook, and housemaid brought up the rear.

"Seven," said brother Ned, filling a corresponding number of glasses with the double-diamond, "and David, eight. There! Now, you're all of you to drink the health of your best friend, Mr. Timothy Linkinwater, and wish him health and long life and many happy returns of this day, both for his own sake and that of your old masters, who consider him an inestimable treasure. Tim Linkinwater, sir, your health. Devil take you, Tim Linkinwater, sir, God bless you!"

With this singular contradiction of terms, brother Ned gave Tim Linkinwater a slap on the back, which made him look, for the moment, almost as apoplectic as the butler; and tossed off the contents of his glass in a twinkling.

The toast was scarcely drunk with all honour to Tim Linkinwater, when the sturdiest and jolliest subordinate elbowed himself a little in advance of his fellows, and, exhibiting a very hot and flushed countenance, pulled a single lock of grey hair in the middle of his forehead as a respectful salute to the company, and delivered himself as follows—rubbing the palms of his hands very hard on a blue cotton handkerchief as he did so:

"We're allowed to take a liberty once a year, gen'lemen, and if you please we'll take it now; there being no time like the present, and no two birds in the hand worth one in the bush, as is well known—leastways in a contrairy sense, which the meaning is the same. (A pause—the butler unconvinced.) What we mean to say is, that there never was (looking at the butler)—such—(looking at the cook) noble—excellent—(looking everywhere, and seeing nobody) free, gene-

rous-spirited masters as them as has treated us so handsome this day. And here's thanking of 'em for all their goodness as is so constancy a diffusing of itself over everywhere, and wishing they may live long and die happy."

When the foregoing speech was over—and it might have been much more elegant and much less to the purpose—the whole body of subordinates, under command of the apoplectic butler, gave three soft cheers; which, to that gentleman's great indignation, were not very regular, inasmuch as the women persisted in giving an immense number of little shrill hurrahs among themselves, in utter disregard of the time. This done, they withdrew; shortly afterwards, Tim Linkinwater's sister withdrew; in reasonable time after that, the sitting was broken up for tea and coffee, and a round game of cards.

At half-past ten—late hours for the square—there appeared a little tray of sandwiches and a bowl of bishop, which bishop, coming on the top of the double-diamond and other excitements, had such an effect upon Tim Linkinwater, that he drew Nicholas aside, and gave him to understand, confidentially, that it was quite true about the uncommonly handsome spinster, and that she was to the full as good-looking as she had been described—more so, indeed—but that she was in too much of a hurry to change her condition, and consequently, while Tim was courting her and thinking of changing his, got married to somebody else. "After all, I dare say it was my fault," said Tim. "I'll show you a print I have got up-stairs, one of these days. It cost me five-and-twenty shillings. I bought it soon after we were cool to each other. Don't mention it, but it's the most extraordinary accidental likeness you ever saw—her very portrait, sir!"

By this time it was past eleven o'clock; and Tim Linkinwater's sister declaring that she ought to have been at home a full hour ago, a coach was procured, into which she was handed with great ceremony by brother Ned, while brother Charles imparted the fullest directions to the coachman, and, besides paying the man a shilling over and above his fare, in order that he might take the utmost care of the lady, all but choked him with a glass of spirits of uncommon strength, and then nearly knocked all the breath out of his body in his energetic endeavours to knock it in again.

At length the coach rumbled off, and Tim Linkinwater's sister being now fairly on her way home, Nicholas and Tim Linkinwater's friend took their leaves together, and left old Tim and the worthy brothers to their repose.

As Nicholas had some distance to walk, it was considerably past midnight by the time he reached home, where he found his mother and Smike sitting up to receive him. It was long after their usual hour of retiring, and they had expected him, at the very latest, two hours ago; but the time had not hung heavily on their hands, for Mrs. Nickleby had entertained Smike with a genealogical account of her family by the mother's side, comprising biographical sketches of the principal members, and Smike had sat wondering what it was all about, and whether it was learnt from a book, or said out of Mrs. Nickleby's own head; so that they got on together very pleasantly.

Nicholas could not go to bed without expatiating on the excellences and munificence of the brothers Cheeryble, and relating the great success which had attended his efforts that day. But, before he had said a dozen words, Mrs. Nickleby, with many sly winks and nods, observed that she was sure Mr. Smike must be quite tired out, and that she positively must insist on his not sitting up a minute longer.

"A most biddable creature he is, to be sure," said Mrs. Nickleby when Smike had wished them good night and left the room. "I know you will excuse me, Nicholas, my dear, but I don't like to do this before a third person; indeed, before a young man it would not be quite proper, though really, after all, I don't know what harm there is in it, except that to be sure it's not a very becoming thing, though some people say it is very much so, and really I don't know why it should not be, if it's well got up, and the borders are small-plaited; of course, a good deal depends upon that."

With which preface, Mrs. Nickleby took her nightcap from between the leaves of a very large Prayer-book, where it had been folded up small, and proceeded to tie it on: talking away, in her usual discursive manner, all the time.

"People may say what they like," observed Mrs. Nickleby, "but there's a great deal of comfort in a nightcap, as I'm sure you would confess, Nicholas, my dear, if you would only have strings to yours, and wear it like a Christian, instead of sticking it upon the very top of your head like a blue-coat boy. You needn't think it an unmanly or quizzical thing to be particular about your nightcap, for I have often heard your poor dear papa, and the Reverend Mr. What's-his-name, who used to read prayers in that old church with the curious little steeple that the weather-cock was blown off the night week before you were born,—I have often heard them say that the young men at college

are uncommonly particular about their nightcaps, and that the Oxford nightcaps are quite celebrated for their strength and goodness; so much so, indeed, that the young men never dream of going to bed without 'em, and I believe it's admitted on all hands that *they* know what's good, and don't coddle themselves."

Nicholas laughed, and entering no further into the subject of this lengthened harangue, reverted to the pleasant tone of the little birthday party. And as Mrs. Nickleby instantly became very curious respecting it, and made a great number of inquiries touching what they had had for dinner, and how it was put on table, and whether it was overdone or underdone, and who was there, and what "the Mr. Cheerybles" said, and what Nicholas said, and what the Mr. Cheerybles said when he said that, Nicholas described the festivities at full length, and also the occurrences of the morning.

"Late as it is," said Nicholas, "I am almost selfish enough to wish that Kate had been up to hear all this. I was all impatience, as I came along, to tell her."

"Why, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby, putting her feet upon the fender, and drawing her chair close to it, as if settling herself for a long talk, "Kate has been in bed—oh! a couple of hours—and I'm very glad, Nicholas, my dear, that I prevailed upon her not to sit up, for I wished very much to have an opportunity of saying a few words to you. I am naturally anxious about it, and of course it's a very delightful and consoling thing to have a grown-up son that one can put confidence in, and advise with—indeed, I don't know any use there would be in having sons at all, unless people could put confidence in them."

Nicholas stopped in the middle of a sleepy yawn, as his mother began to speak; and looked at her with fixed attention.

"There was a lady in our neighbourhood," said Mrs. Nickleby—"speaking of sons puts me in mind of it—a lady in our neighbourhood when we lived near Dawlish, I think her name was Rogers; indeed, I am sure it was if it wasn't Murphy, which is the only doubt I have——"

"Is it about her, mother, that you wished to speak to me?" said Nicholas quietly.

"About *her!*" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "Good gracious, Nicholas, my dear, how *can* you be so ridiculous? But that was always the way with your poor dear papa,—just his way, always wandering, never able to fix his thoughts on any one subject for two minutes together. I think I see him now!" said Mrs. Nickleby, wiping her eyes, "looking at me while I was talking to him about his affairs, just as if his ideas were in a state of perfect conglomeration! Anybody who had come in upon us suddenly would have supposed I was confusing and distracting him, instead of making things plainer; upon my word they would."

"I am very sorry, mother, that I should inherit this unfortunate slowness of apprehension," said Nicholas kindly; "but I'll do my best to understand you, if you'll only go straight on: indeed I will."

"Your poor pa!" said Mrs. Nickleby, pondering. "He never knew, till it was too late, what I would have had him do!"

This was undoubtedly the case, inasmuch as the deceased Mr. Nickleby had not arrived at the knowledge when he died. Neither had Mrs. Nickleby herself; which is, in some sort, an explanation of the circumstance.

"However," said Mrs. Nickleby, drying her tears, "this has nothing to do—certainly nothing whatever to do—with the gentleman in the next house."

"I should suppose that the gentleman in the next house has as little to do with us," returned Nicholas.

"There can be no doubt," said Mrs. Nickleby, "that he *is* a gentleman, and has the manners of a gentleman, and the appearance of a gentleman, although he does wear smalls and grey worsted stockings. That may be eccentricity, or he may be proud of his legs. I don't see why he shouldn't be. The Prince Regent was proud of his legs, and so was Daniel Lambert, who was also a fat man; *he* was proud of his legs. So was Miss Biffin: she was—no," added Mrs. Nickleby, correcting herself, "I think she had only toes, but the principle is the same."

Nicholas looked on, quite amazed at the introduction of this new theme. Which seemed just what Mrs. Nickleby had expected him to be.

"You may well be surprised, Nicholas, my dear," she said; "I am sure *I* was. It came upon me like a flash of fire, and almost froze my blood. The bottom of his garden joins the bottom of ours, and of course I had several times seen him sitting among the scarlet-beans in his little arbour, or working at his little hotbeds. I used to think he stared rather, but I didn't take any particular notice of that, as we were new-comers, and he might be curious to see what we were like. But when he began to throw his cucumbers over our wall——"

"To throw his cucumbers over our wall!" repeated Nicholas in great astonishment.

"Yes, Nicholas, my dear," replied Mrs. Nickleby in a very serious tone; "his cucum-

bers over our wall. And vegetable marrows likewise."

"Confound his impudence!" said Nicholas, firing immediately. "What does he mean by that?"

"I don't think he means it impertinently at all," replied Mrs. Nickleby.

"What!" said Nicholas, "cucumbers and vegetable marrows flying at the heads of the family as they walk in their own garden, and not meant impertinently! Why, mother——"

Nicholas stopped short; for there was an indescribable expression of placid triumph, mingled with a modest confusion, lingering between the borders of Mrs. Nickleby's nightcap, which arrested his attention suddenly.

"He must be a very weak, and foolish, and inconsiderate man," said Mrs. Nickleby; "blamable, indeed—at least, I suppose other people would consider him so; of course I can't be expected to express any opinion on that point, especially after always defending your poor dear papa when other people blamed him for making proposals to me; and to be sure there can be no doubt that he has taken a very singular way of showing it. Still, at the same time, his attentions are—that is, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent, of course—a flattering sort of thing; and, although I should never dream of marrying again with a dear girl like Kate still unsettled in life——"

"Surely, mother, such an idea never entered your brain for an instant?" said Nicholas.

"Bless my heart, Nicholas, my dear," returned his mother in a peevish tone, "isn't that precisely what I am saying, if you would only let me speak? Of course, I never gave it a second thought, and I am surprised and astonished that you should suppose me capable of such a thing. All I say is, what step is the best to take, so as to reject these advances civilly and delicately, and without hurting his feelings too much, and driving him to despair, or anything of that kind? My goodness me!" exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby with a half-simper, "suppose he was to go doing anything rash to himself. Could I ever be happy again, Nicholas?"

Despite his vexation and concern, Nicholas could scarcely help smiling as he rejoined, "Now, do you think, mother, that such a result would be likely to ensue from the most cruel repulse?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," returned Mrs. Nickleby; "really I don't know. I am sure there was a case in the day before yesterday's paper, extracted from one of the French newspapers, about a journeyman shoemaker who was jealous of a young girl in an adjoining village, because she wouldn't shut herself up in an air-tight three-pair of stairs, and charcoal herself to death with him; and who went and hid himself in a wood with a sharp-pointed knife, and rushed out, as she was passing by with a few friends, and killed himself first, and then all the friends, and then her—no, killed all the friends first, and then herself, and then *him*self—which it is quite frightful to think of. Somehow or other," added Mrs. Nickleby after a momentary pause, "they always *are* journeymen shoemakers who do these things in France, according to the papers. I don't know how it is—something in the leather, I suppose."

"But this man, who is not a shoemaker—what has he done, mother, what has he said?" inquired Nicholas, fretted almost beyond endurance, but looking nearly as resigned and patient as Mrs. Nickleby herself. "You know there is no language of vegetables, which converts a cucumber into a formal declaration of attachment."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Nickleby, tossing her head and looking at the ashes in the grate, "he has done and said all sorts of things."

"Is there no mistake on your part?" asked Nicholas.

"Mistake!" cried Mrs. Nickleby. "Lord, Nicholas, my dear, do you suppose I don't know when a man's in earnest?"

"Well, well!" muttered Nicholas.

"Every time I go to the window," said Mrs. Nickleby, "he kisses one hand, and lays the other upon his heart—of course it's very foolish of him to do so, and I dare say you'll say it's very wrong, but he does it very respectfully—very respectfully indeed—and very tenderly, extremely tenderly. So far, he deserves the greatest credit; there can be no doubt about that. Then, there are the presents which come pouring over the wall every day, and very fine they certainly are, very fine; we had one of the cucumbers at dinner yesterday, and think of pickling the rest for next winter. And last evening," added Mrs. Nickleby with increased confusion, "he called gently over the wall, as I was walking in the garden, and proposed marriage, and an elopement. His voice is as clear as a bell or a musical glass—very like a musical glass indeed—but of course I didn't listen to it. Then, the question is, Nicholas, my dear, what am I to do?"

"Does Kate know of this?" asked Nicholas.

"I have not said a word about it yet," answered his mother.

"Then, for Heaven's sake," rejoined Nicholas, rising, "do not, for it would make her very unhappy. And with regard to what you should do, my dear mother, do what your good sense and feeling, and respect for my father's memory, would

prompt. There are a thousand ways in which you can show your dislike of these preposterous and doting attentions. If you act as decidedly as you ought, and they are still continued, and to your annoyance, I can speedily put a stop to them. But I should not interfere in a matter so ridiculous, and attach importance to it, until you have vindicated yourself. Most women can do that, but especially one of your age and condition, in circumstances like these, which are unworthy of a serious thought. I would not shame you by seeming to take them to heart, or treat them earnestly for an instant. Absurd old idiot!"

So saying, Nicholas kissed his mother, and bade her good night, and they retired to their respective chambers.

To do Mrs. Nickleby justice, her attachment to her children would have prevented her seriously contemplating a second marriage, even if she could have so far conquered her recollections of her late husband as to have any strong inclinations that way. But, although there was no evil and little real selfishness in Mrs. Nickleby's heart, she had a weak head and a vain one; and there was something so flattering in being sought (and vainly sought) in marriage at this time of day, that she could not dismiss the passion of the unknown gentleman quite so summarily or lightly as Nicholas appeared to deem becoming.

"As to its being preposterous, and doting, and ridiculous," thought Mrs. Nickleby, communing with herself in her own room, "I don't see that at all. It's hopeless on his part, certainly; but why he should be an absurd old idiot I confess I don't see. He is not to be supposed to know it's hopeless. Poor fellow! He is to be pitied, *I* think!"

Having made these reflections, Mrs. Nickleby looked in her little dressing-glass, and, walking backward a few steps from it, tried to remember who it was who used to say that when Nicholas was one-and-twenty he would have more the appearance of her brother than her son. Not being able to call the authority to mind, she extinguished her candle, and drew up the window blind to admit the light of morning, which had, by this time, begun to dawn.

"It's a bad light to distinguish objects in," murmured Mrs. Nickleby, peering into the garden, "and my eyes are not very good—I was short-sighted from a child—but, upon my word, I think there's another large vegetable marrow sticking, at this moment, on the broken glass bottles at the top of the wall!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

COMPRISES CERTAIN PARTICULARS ARISING OUT OF A VISIT OF CONDOLENCE, WHICH MAY PROVE IMPORTANT HEREAFTER. SMIKE UNEXPECTEDLY ENCOUNTERS A VERY OLD FRIEND, WHO INVITES HIM TO HIS HOUSE, AND WILL TAKE NO DENIAL.

QUITE unconscious of the demonstrations of their amorous neighbour, or their effects upon the susceptible bosom of her mamma, Kate Nickleby had, by this time, begun to enjoy a settled feeling of tranquillity and happiness, to which, even in occasional and transitory glimpses, she had long been a stranger. Living under the same roof with the beloved brother from whom she had been so suddenly and hardly separated: with a mind at ease, and free from any persecutions which could call a blush into her cheek, or a pang into her heart: she seemed to have passed into a new state of being. Her former cheerfulness was restored, her step regained its elasticity and lightness, the colour which had forsaken her cheek visited it once again, and Kate Nickleby looked more beautiful than ever.

Such was the result to which Miss La Creevy's ruminations and observations led her, when the cottage had been, as she emphatically said, "thoroughly got to rights, from the chimney-pots to the street-door scraper," and the busy little woman had at length a moment's time to think about its inmates.

"Which I declare I haven't had since I first came down here," said Miss La Creevy; "for I have thought of nothing but hammers, nails, screw-drivers, and gimlets, morning, noon, and night."

"You never bestowed one thought upon yourself, I believe," returned Kate, smiling.

"Upon my word, my dear, when there are so many pleasanter things to think of, I should be a goose if I did," said Miss La Creevy. "By-the-bye, I *have* thought of somebody too. Do you know that I observe a great change in one of this family—a very extraordinary change?"

"In whom?" asked Kate anxiously. "Not in——"

"Not in your brother, my dear," returned Miss La Creevy, anticipating the close of the sentence, "for he is always the same affectionate, good-natured, clever creature, with a spice of the—I won't say who—in him, when there's any occasion, that he was when I first knew you. No. Smike, as he *will* be called, poor fellow! for he won't hear of a *Mr.* before his name, is greatly altered, even in this short time."

"How?" asked Kate. "Not in health?"

"N-n-o; perhaps not in health, exactly," said Miss La Creevy, pausing to consider, "although he is a worn and feeble creature, and has that in his face which it would wring my heart to see in yours. No; not in health."

"How then?"

"I scarcely know," said the miniature painter. "But I have watched him, and he has brought the tears into my eyes many times. It is not a very difficult matter to do that, certainly, for I am easily melted; still, I think these came with good cause and reason. I am sure that, since he has been here, he has grown, from some strong cause, more conscious of his weak intellect. He feels it more. It gives him greater pain to know that he wanders sometimes, and cannot understand very simple things. I have watched him when you have not been by, my dear, sit brooding by himself, with such a look of pain as I could scarcely bear to see, and then get up and leave the room: so sorrowfully, and in such dejection, that I cannot tell you how it has hurt me. Not three weeks ago, he was a light-hearted, busy creature, overjoyed to be in a bustle, and as happy as the day is long. Now he is another being—the same willing, harmless, faithful, loving creature—but the same in nothing else."

"Surely this will all pass off," said Kate. "Poor fellow!"

"I hope," returned her little friend with a gravity very unusual in her, "it may. I hope, for the sake of that poor lad, it may. However," said Miss La Creevy, relapsing into the cheerful, chattering tone which was habitual to her, "I have said my say, and a very long say it is, and a very wrong say too, I shouldn't wonder at all. I shall cheer him up to-night, at all events; for, if he is to be my squire all the way to the Strand, I shall talk on, and on, and on, and never leave off, till I have roused him into a laugh at something. So, the sooner he goes, the better for him, and the sooner I go, the better for me, I am sure, or else I shall have my maid gallivanting with somebody who may rob the house—though what there is to take away, besides tables and chairs, I don't know, except the miniatures: and he is a clever thief who can dispose of them to any great advantage, for *I* can't, I know, and that's the honest truth."

So saying, little Miss La Creevy hid her face in a very flat bonnet, and herself in a very big shawl; and fixing herself tightly into the latter, by means of a large pin, declared that the omnibus might come as soon as it pleased, for she was quite ready.

But there was still Mrs. Nickleby to take leave of; and long before that good lady had concluded some reminiscences bearing upon, and appropriate to, the occasion, the omnibus arrived. This put Miss La Creevy in a great bustle, in consequence whereof, as she secretly rewarded the servant-girl with eighteen-pence behind the street-door, she pulled out of her reticule ten-pennyworth of halfpence, which rolled into all possible corners of the passage, and occupied some considerable time in the picking up. This ceremony had, of course, to be succeeded by a second kissing of Kate and Mrs. Nickleby, and a gathering together of the little basket and the brown-paper parcel, during which proceedings, "the omnibus," as Miss La Creevy protested, "swore so dreadfully, that it was quite awful to hear it." At length and at last, it made a feint of going away, and then Miss La Creevy darted out, and darted in, apologising with great volubility to all the passengers, and declaring that she wouldn't purposely have kept them waiting on any account whatever. While she was looking about for a convenient seat, the conductor pushed Smike in, and cried that it was all right—though it wasn't—and away went the huge vehicle, with the noise of half-a-dozen brewers' drays at least.

Leaving it to pursue its journey at the pleasure of the conductor afore-mentioned, who lounged gracefully on his little shelf behind, smoking an odoriferous cigar; and leaving it to stop, or go on, or gallop, or crawl, as that gentleman deemed expedient and advisable; this narrative may embrace the opportunity of ascertaining the condition of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and to what extent he had, by this time, recovered from the injuries consequent on being flung violently from his cabriolet, under the circumstances already detailed.

With a shattered limb, a body severely bruised, a face disfigured by half-healed scars, and pallid from the exhaustion of recent pain and fever, Sir Mulberry Hawk lay stretched upon his back, on the couch to which he was doomed to be a prisoner for some weeks yet to come. Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck sat drinking hard in the next room, now and then varying the monotonous murmurs of their conversation with a half-smothered laugh, while the young lord—the only member of the party who was not thoroughly irredeemable, and who really had a kind heart—sat beside his Mentor, with a cigar in his mouth, and read to him, by the light of a lamp, such scraps of intelligence from a paper of the day as were most likely to yield him interest or amusement.

"Curse those hounds!" said the invalid, turning his head impatiently towards the adjoining room; "will nothing stop their infernal throats?"

Messrs. Pyke and Pluck heard the exclamation, and stopped immediately: winking to each other as they did so, and filling their glasses to the brim, as some recompense for the deprivation of speech.

"Damn!" muttered the sick man between his teeth, and writhing impatiently in his bed. "Isn't this mattress hard enough, and the room dull enough, and pain bad enough, but *they* must torture me? What's the time?"

"Half-past eight," replied his friend.

"Here, draw the table nearer, and let us have the cards again," said Sir Mulberry. "More piquet. Come."

It was curious to see how eagerly the sick man, debarred from any change of position save the mere turning of his head from side to side, watched every motion of his friend in the progress of the game; and with what eagerness and interest he played, and yet how warily and coolly. His address and skill were more than twenty times a match for his adversary, who could make little head against them, even when fortune favoured him with good cards, which was not often the case. Sir Mulberry won every game; and when his companion threw down the cards, and refused to play any longer, thrust forth his wasted arm and caught up the stakes with a boastful oath, and the same hoarse laugh, though considerably lowered in tone, that had resounded in Ralph Nickleby's dining-room, months before.

While he was thus occupied his man appeared, to announce that Mr. Ralph Nickleby was below, and wished to know how he was to-night.

"Better," said Sir Mulberry impatiently.

"Mr. Nickleby wishes to know, sir——"

"I tell you, better," replied Sir Mulberry, striking his hand upon the table.

The man hesitated for a moment or two, and then said that Mr. Nickleby had requested permission to see Sir Mulberry Hawk, if it was not inconvenient.

"It *is* inconvenient. I can't see him. I can't see anybody," said his master, more violently than before. "You know that, you blockhead."

"I am very sorry, sir," returned the man. "But Mr. Nickleby pressed so much, sir——"

The fact was, that Ralph Nickleby had bribed the man, who, being anxious to earn his money with a view to future favours, held the door in his hand, and ventured to linger still.

"Did he say whether he had any business to speak about?" inquired Sir Mulberry after a little impatient consideration.

"No, sir. He said he wished to see you, sir. Particularly, Mr. Nickleby said, sir."

"Tell him to come up. Here," cried Sir Mulberry, calling the man back, as he passed his hand over his disfigured face, "move that lamp, and put it on the stand behind me. Wheel that table away, and place a chair there—further off. Leave it so."

The man obeyed these directions as if he quite comprehended the motive with which they were dictated, and left the room. Lord Frederick Verisopht, remarking that he would look in presently, strolled into the adjoining apartment, and closed the folding door behind him.

Then was heard a subdued footstep on the stairs; and Ralph Nickleby, hat in hand, crept softly into the room, with his body bent forward as if in profound respect, and his eyes fixed upon the face of his worthy client.

"Well, Nickleby," said Sir Mulberry, motioning him to the chair by the couch side, and waving his hand in assumed carelessness, "I have had a bad accident, you see."

"I see," rejoined Ralph with the same steady gaze. "Bad indeed! I should not have known you, Sir Mulberry. Dear, dear! This *is* bad."

Ralph's manner was one of profound humility and respect; and the low tone of voice was that which the gentlest consideration for a sick man would have taught a visitor to assume. But the expression of his face, Sir Mulberry's being averted, was in extraordinary contrast; and as he stood, in his usual attitude, calmly looking on the prostrate form before him, all that part of his features which was not cast into shadow by his protruding and contracted brows, bore the impress of a sarcastic smile.

"Sit down," said Sir Mulberry, turning towards him as though by a violent effort. "Am I a sight, that you stand gazing there?"

As he turned his face, Ralph recoiled a step or two, and making as though he were irresistibly impelled to express astonishment, but was determined not to do so, sat down with well-acted confusion.

"I have inquired at the door, Sir Mulberry, every day," said Ralph, "twice a day, indeed, at first—and to-night, presuming upon old acquaintance, and past transactions by which we have mutually benefited in some degree, I could not resist soliciting admission to your chamber. Have you—have you suffered much?" said Ralph, bending forward, and allowing the same harsh smile to gather upon his face as the other closed his eyes.

"More than enough to please me, and less than enough to please some broken-down hacks that you and I know of, and who lay their ruin between us, I dare say," returned Sir Mulberry, tossing his arm restlessly upon the coverlet.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders in deprecation of the intense irritation with which this had been said; for there was an aggravating, cold distinctness in his speech and manner which so grated on the sick man that he could scarcely endure it.

"And what is it in these 'past transactions' that brought you here to-night?" asked Sir Mulberry.

"Nothing," replied Ralph. "There are some bills of my lord's which need renewal; but let them be till you are well. I—I—came," said Ralph, speaking more slowly, and with harsher emphasis, "I came to say how grieved I am that any relative of mine, although disowned by me, should have inflicted such punishment on you as——"

"Punishment!" interposed Sir Mulberry.

"I know it has been a severe one," said Ralph, wilfully mistaking the meaning of the interruption, "and that has made me the more anxious to tell you that I disown this vagabond —that I acknowledge him as no kin of mine— and that I leave him to take his deserts from you, and every man besides. You may wring his neck if you please. *I* shall not interfere."

"This story that they tell me here has got abroad, then, has it?" asked Sir Mulberry, clenching his hands and teeth.

"Noised in all directions," replied Ralph. "Every club and gaming-room has rung with it. There has been a good song made about it, as I am told," said Ralph, looking eagerly at his questioner. "I have not heard it myself, not being in the way of such things, but I have been told it's even printed—for private circulation—but that's all over town, of course."

"It's a lie!" said Sir Mulberry; "I tell you it's all a lie! The mare took fright."

"They *say* he frightened her," observed Ralph in the same unmoved and quiet manner. "Some say he frightened you, but *that*'s a lie, I know. I have said that boldly—oh, a score of times! I am a peaceable man, but I can't hear folks tell that of you—no, no."

When Sir Mulberry found coherent words to utter, Ralph bent forward with his hand to his ear, and a face as calm as if its every line of sternness had been cast in iron.

"When I am off this cursed bed," said the invalid, actually striking at his broken leg in the ecstasy of his passion, "I'll have such revenge as never man had yet. By G— I will! Accident favouring him, he has marked me for a week or two, but I'll put a mark on him that he shall carry to his grave. I'll slit his nose and ears—flog him—maim him for life. I'll do more than that; I'll drag that pattern of chastity, that pink of prudery, the delicate sister, through——"

It might have been that even Ralph's cold blood tingled in his cheeks at that moment. It might have been that Sir Mulberry remembered that, knave and usurer as he was, he must, in some early time of infancy, have twined his arm about her father's neck. He stopped, and, menacing with his hand, confirmed the unuttered threat with a tremendous oath.

"It is a galling thing," said Ralph after a short term of silence, during which he had eyed the sufferer keenly, "to think that the man about town, the rake, the *roué*, the rook of twenty seasons, should be brought to this pass by a mere boy!"

Sir Mulberry darted a wrathful look at him, but Ralph's eyes were bent upon the ground, and his face wore no other expression than one of thoughtfulness.

"A raw, slight stripling," continued Ralph, "against a man whose very weight might crush him; to say nothing of his skill in—— I am right, I think," said Ralph, raising his eyes, "you *were* a patron of the ring once, were you not?"

The sick man made an impatient gesture, which Ralph chose to consider as one of acquiescence.

"Ha!" he said, "I thought so. That was before I knew you, but I was pretty sure I couldn't be mistaken. He is light and active, I suppose. But those were slight advantages compared with yours. Luck, luck—these hang-dog outcasts have it."

"He'll need the most he has when I am well again," said Sir Mulberry Hawk, "let him fly where he will."

"Oh!" returned Ralph quickly, "he doesn't dream of that. He is here, good sir, waiting your pleasure—here in London, walking the streets at noonday; carrying it off jauntily; looking for you, I swear," said Ralph, his face darkening, and his own hatred getting the upper hand of him, for the first time, as this gay picture of Nicholas presented itself. "If we were only citizens of a country where it could be safely done, I'd give good money to have him stabbed to the heart, and rolled into the kennel for the dogs to tear."

As Ralph, somewhat to the surprise of his old client, vented this little piece of sound family

feeling, and took up his hat preparatory to departing, Lord Frederick Verisopht looked in.

"Why, what in the deyvle's name, Hawk, have you and Nickleby been talking about?" said the young man. "I neyver heard such an insufferable riot. Croak, croak, croak. Bow, wow, wow. What has it all been about?"

"Sir Mulberry has been angry, my lord," said Ralph, looking towards the couch.

"Not about money, I hope? Nothing has gone wrong in business, has it, Nickleby?"

"No, my lord, no," returned Ralph. "On that point we always agree. Sir Mulberry has been calling to mind the cause of——"

There was neither necessity nor opportunity for Ralph to proceed; for Sir Mulberry took up the theme, and vented his threats and oaths against Nicholas, almost as ferociously as before.

Ralph, who was no common observer, was surprised to see that, as this tirade proceeded, the manner of Lord Frederick Verisopht, who at the commencement had been twirling his

"YE-ES," SAID THE OTHER, TURNING FULL UPON HIM. "IF YOU HAD TOLD HIM WHO YOU WERE; IF YOU HAD GIVEN HIM YOUR CARD, AND FOUND OUT, AFTERWARDS, THAT HIS STATION OR CHARACTER PREVENTED YOUR FIGHTING HIM, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BAD ENOUGH THEN."

whiskers with a most dandified and listless air, underwent a complete alteration. He was still more surprised when, Sir Mulberry ceasing to speak, the young lord angrily, and almost unaffectedly, requested never to have the subject renewed in his presence.

"Mind that, Hawk!" he added with unusual energy. "I never will be a party to, or permit, if I can help it, a cowardly attack upon this young fellow."

"Cowardly!" interrupted his friend.

"Ye-es," said the other, turning full upon him. "If you had told him who you were; if you had given him your card, and found out, afterwards, that his station or character prevented your fighting him, it would have been bad enough then; upon my soul it would have been bad enough then. As it is, you did wrong. I did wrong too, not to interfere, and I am sorry for it. What happened to you afterwards was as much

the consequence of accident as design, and more your fault than his; and it shall not, with my knowledge, be cruelly visited upon him—it shall not indeed."

With this emphatic repetition of his concluding words, the young lord turned upon his heel; but, before he had reached the adjoining room, he turned back again, and said, with even greater vehemence than he had displayed before:

"I do believe, now, upon my honour I do believe, that the sister is as virtuous and modest a young lady as she is a handsome one; and of the brother I say this, that he acted as her brother should, and in a manly and spirited manner. And I only wish, with all my heart and soul, that any one of us came out of this matter half as well as he does."

So saying, Lord Frederick Verisopht walked out of the room, leaving Ralph Nickleby and Sir Mulberry in most unpleasant astonishment.

"Is this your pupil?" asked Ralph softly, "or has he come fresh from some country parson?"

"Green fools take these fits sometimes," replied Sir Mulberry Hawk, biting his lip, and pointing to the door. "Leave him to me."

Ralph exchanged a familiar look with his old acquaintance; for they had suddenly grown confidential again in this alarming surprise; and took his way home, thoughtfully and slowly.

While these things were being said and done, and long before they were concluded, the omnibus had disgorged Miss La Creevy and her escort, and they had arrived at her own door. Now, the good-nature of the little miniature painter would by no means allow of Smike's walking back again until he had been previously refreshed with just a sip of something comfortable, and a mixed biscuit or so; and Smike, entertaining no objection either to the sip of something comfortable, or the mixed biscuit, but considering, on the contrary, that they would be a very pleasant preparation for a walk to Bow, it fell out that he delayed much longer than he originally intended, and that it was some half-hour after dusk when he set forth on his journey home.

There was no likelihood of his losing his way, for it lay quite straight before him, and he had walked into town with Nicholas, and back alone, almost every day. So, Miss La Creevy and he shook hands with mutual confidence, and, being charged with more kind remembrances to Mrs. and Miss Nickleby, Smike started off.

At the foot of Ludgate Hill, he turned a little out of the road to satisfy his curiosity by having a look at Newgate. After staring up at the sombre walls, from the opposite side of the way, with great care and dread for some minutes, he turned back again into the old track, and walked briskly through the City; stopping now and then to gaze in at the window of some particularly attractive shop, then running for a little way, then stopping again, and so on, as any other country lad might do.

He had been gazing for a long time through a jeweller's window, wishing he could take some of the beautiful trinkets home as a present, and imagining what delight they would afford if he could, when the clocks struck three-quarters past eight. Roused by the sound, he hurried on at a very quick pace, and was crossing the corner of a by-street when he felt himself violently brought to, with a jerk so sudden that he was obliged to cling to a lamp-post to save himself from falling. At the same moment, a small boy clung tight round his leg, and a shrill cry of "Here he is, father! Hooray!" vibrated in his ears.

Smike knew that voice too well. He cast his despairing eyes downward towards the form from which it had proceeded, and, shuddering from head to foot, looked round. Mr. Squeers had hooked him in the coat collar with the handle of his umbrella, and was hanging on at the other end with all his might and main. The cry of triumph proceeded from Master Wackford, who, regardless of all his kicks and struggles, clung to him with the tenacity of a bull-dog!

One glance showed him this; and in that one glance the terrified creature became utterly powerless and unable to utter a sound.

"Here's a go!" cried Mr. Squeers, gradually coming hand over hand down the umbrella, and only unhooking it when he had got tight hold of the victim's collar. "Here's a delicious go! Wackford, my boy, call up one of them coaches."

"A coach, father!" cried little Wackford.

"Yes, a coach, sir," replied Squeers, feasting his eyes upon the countenance of Smike. "Damn the expense! Let's have him in a coach."

"What's he been a doing of?" asked a labourer with a hod of bricks, against whom and a fellow-labourer Mr. Squeers had backed, on the first jerk of the umbrella.

"Everything!" replied Mr. Squeers, looking fixedly at his old pupil in a sort of rapturous trance. "Everything—running away, sir—joining in bloodthirsty attacks upon his master—there's nothing that's bad that he hasn't done. Oh, what a delicious go is this here, good Lord!"

The man looked from Squeers to Smike; but such mental faculties as the poor fellow pos-

sessed had utterly deserted him. The coach came up; Master Wackford entered; Squeers pushed in his prize, and, following close at his heels, pulled up the glasses. The coachman mounted his box and drove slowly off, leaving the two bricklayers, and an old apple-woman, and a town-made little boy returning from an evening school, who had been the only witnesses of the scene, to meditate upon it at their leisure.

Mr. Squeers sat himself down on the opposite seat to the unfortunate Smike, and, planting his hands firmly on his knees, looked at him for some five minutes, when, seeming to recover from his trance, he uttered a loud laugh, and slapped his old pupil's face several times—taking the right and left sides alternately.

"It isn't a dream!" said Squeers. "That's real flesh and blood! I know the feel of it!" and, being quite assured of his good fortune by these experiments, Mr. Squeers administered a few boxes on the ear, lest the entertainments should seem to partake of sameness, and laughed louder and longer at every one.

"Your mother will be fit to jump out of her skin, my boy, when she hears of this," said Squeers to his son.

"Oh, won't she, though, father?" replied Master Wackford.

"To think," said Squeers, "that you and me should be turning out of a street, and come upon him at the very nick; and that I should have him tight, at only one cast of the umbrella, as if I had hooked him with a grappling-iron!—Ha, ha!"

"Didn't I catch hold of his leg, neither, father?" said little Wackford.

"You did; like a good 'un, my boy," said Mr. Squeers, patting his son's head, "and you shall have the best button-over jacket and waistcoat that the next new boy brings down, as a reward of merit—mind that. You always keep on in the same path, and do them things that you see your father do, and when you die you'll go right slap to Heaven, and no questions asked."

Improving the occasion in these words, Mr. Squeers patted his son's head again, and then patted Smike's—but harder; and inquired in a bantering tone how he found himself by this time.

"I must go home," replied Smike, looking wildly round.

"To be sure you must. You're about right there," replied Mr. Squeers. "You'll go home very soon, you will. You'll find yourself at the peaceful village of Dotheboys, in Yorkshire, in something under a week's time, my young friend; and, the next time you get away from there, I give you leave to keep away. Where's the clothes you run off in, you ungrateful robber?" said Mr. Squeers in a severe voice.

Smike glanced at the neat attire which the care of Nicholas had provided for him, and wrung his hands.

"Do you know that I could hang you up, outside of the Old Bailey, for making away with them articles of property?" said Squeers. "Do you know that it's a hanging matter—and I an't quite certain whether it an't an anatomy one besides—to walk off with up'ards of the valley of five pound from a dwelling-house? Eh—do you know that? What do you suppose was the worth of them clothes you had? Do you know that that Wellington boot you wore cost eight-and-twenty shillings when it was a pair, and the shoe seven-and-six? But you came to the right shop for mercy when you came to me, and thank your stars that it *is* me as has got to serve you with the article."

Anybody not in Mr. Squeers's confidence would have supposed that he was quite out of the article in question, instead of having a large stock on hand ready for all comers; nor would the opinion of sceptical persons have undergone much alteration when he followed up the remark by poking Smike in the chest with the ferrule of his umbrella, and dealing a smart shower of blows, with the ribs of the same instrument, upon his head and shoulders.

"I never threshed a boy in a hackney coach before," said Mr. Squeers when he stopped to rest. "There's inconveniency in it, but the novelty gives it a sort of relish, too!"

Poor Smike! He warded off the blows as well as he could, and now shrunk into a corner of the coach, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on his knees; he was stunned and stupefied, and had no more idea that any act of his would enable him to escape from the all-powerful Squeers, now that he had no friend to speak to or advise with, than he had had in all the weary years of his Yorkshire life which preceded the arrival of Nicholas.

The journey seemed endless; street after street was entered and left behind; and still they went jolting on. At last Mr. Squeers began to thrust his head out of the window every half-minute, and to bawl a variety of directions to the coachman; and after passing, with some difficulty, through several mean streets which the appearance of the houses and the bad state of the road denoted to have been recently built, Mr. Squeers suddenly tugged at the check-string with all his might, and cried, "Stop!"

"What are you pulling a man's arm off for?" said the coachman, looking angrily down.

"That's the house," replied Squeers. "The second of them four little houses, one story high, with the green shutters—there's a brass plate on the door, with the name of Snawley."

"Couldn't you say that without wrenching a man's limbs off his body?" inquired the coachman.

"No!" bawled Mr. Squeers. "Say another word, and I'll summons you for having a broken winder. Stop!"

Obedient to this direction, the coach stopped at Mr. Snawley's door. Mr. Snawley may be remembered as the sleek and sanctified gentleman who confided two sons (*in law*) to the parental care of Mr. Squeers, as narrated in the fourth chapter of this history. Mr. Snawley's house was on the extreme borders of some new settlements adjoining Somers Town, and Mr. Squeers had taken lodgings therein for a short time, as his stay was longer than usual, and the Saracen, having experience of Master Wackford's appetite, had declined to receive him on any other terms than as a full-grown customer.

"Here we are!" said Squeers, hurrying Smike into the little parlour, where Mr. Snawley and his wife were taking a lobster supper. "Here's the vagrant—the felon—the rebel—the monster of unthankfulness."

"What! The boy that run away!" cried Snawley, resting his knife and fork upright on the table, and opening his eyes to their full width.

"The very boy," said Squeers, putting his fist close to Smike's nose, and drawing it away again, and repeating the process several times, with a vicious aspect. "If there wasn't a lady present, I'd fetch him such a—— Never mind, I'll owe it him."

And here Mr. Squeers related how, and in what manner, and when and where, he had picked up the runaway.

"It's clear that there has been a Providence in it, sir," said Mr. Snawley, casting down his eyes with an air of humility, and elevating his fork, with a bit of lobster on the top of it, towards the ceiling.

"Providence is against him, no doubt," replied Mr. Squeers, scratching his nose. "Of course; that was to be expected. Anybody might have known that."

"Hard-heartedness and evil-doing will never prosper, sir," said Mr. Snawley.

"Never was such a thing known," rejoined Squeers, taking a little roll of notes from his pocket-book, to see that they were all safe.

"I have been, Mrs. Snawley," said Mr. Squeers when he had satisfied himself upon this point, "I have been that chap's benefactor, feeder, teacher, and clothier. I have been that chap's classical, commercial, mathematical, philosophical, and trigonomical friend. My son—my only son, Wackford—has been his brother; Mrs. Squeers has been his mother, grandmother, aunt, —ah! and I may say uncle too, all in one. She never cottoned to anybody, except them two engaging and delightful boys of yours, as she cottoned to this chap. What's my return? What's come of my milk of human kindness? It turns into curds and whey when I look at him."

"Well it may, sir," said Mrs. Snawley. "Oh! Well it may, sir."

"Where has he been all this time?" inquired Snawley. "Has he been living with——?"

"Ah, sir!" interposed Squeers, confronting him again. "Have you been a living with that there devilish Nickleby, sir?"

But no threats or cuffs could elicit from Smike one word of reply to this question; for he had internally resolved that he would rather perish in the wretched prison to which he was again about to be consigned, than utter one syllable which could involve his first and true friend. He had already called to mind the strict injunctions of secrecy as to his past life, which Nicholas had laid upon him when they travelled from Yorkshire; and a confused and perplexed idea that his benefactor might have committed some terrible crime in bringing him away, which would render him liable to heavy punishment if detected, had contributed, in some degree, to reduce him to his present state of apathy and terror.

Such were the thoughts—if to visions so imperfect and undefined as those which wandered through his enfeebled brain the term can be applied—which were present to the mind of Smike, and rendered him deaf alike to intimidation and persuasion. Finding every effort useless, Mr. Squeers conducted him to a little back-room up-stairs, where he was to pass the night; and, taking the precaution of removing his shoes, and coat and waistcoat, and also of locking the door on the outside, lest he should muster up sufficient energy to make an attempt at escape, that worthy gentleman left him to his meditations.

What those meditations were, and how the poor creature's heart sunk within him when he thought—when did he, for a moment, cease to think?—of his late home, and the dear friends and familiar faces with which it was associated, cannot be told. To prepare the mind for such a heavy sleep, its growth must be stopped by rigour and cruelty in childhood; there must be years of misery and suffering, lightened by no ray of hope; the chords of the heart, which

beat a quick response to the voice of gentleness and affection, must have rusted and broken in their secret places, and bear the lingering echo of no old word of love or kindness. Gloomy indeed must have been the short day, and dull the long, long twilight, preceding such a night of intellect as his.

There were voices which would have roused him, even then; but their welcome tones could not penetrate there; and he crept to bed the same listless, hopeless, blighted creature that Nicholas had first found him at the Yorkshire school.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH ANOTHER OLD FRIEND ENCOUNTERS SMIKE, VERY OPPORTUNELY AND TO SOME PURPOSE.

THE night, fraught with so much bitterness to one poor soul, had given place to a bright and cloudless summer morning, when a north-country mail-coach traversed, with cheerful noise, the yet silent streets of Islington, and, giving brisk note of its approach with the lively winding of the guard's horn, clattered onward to its halting-place hard by the Post Office.

The only outside passenger was a burly, honest-looking countryman on the box, who, with his eyes fixed upon the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, appeared so wrapped in admiring wonder as to be quite insensible to all the bustle of getting out the bags and parcels, until one of the coach windows being let sharply down, he looked round, and encountered a pretty female face which was just then thrust out.

"See there, lass!" bawled the countryman, pointing towards the object of his admiration. "There be Paul's Church. Ecod, he be a soizable 'un, he be."

"Goodness, John! I shouldn't have thought it could have been half the size. What a monster!"

"Monsther!—Ye're aboot right there, I reckon, Mrs. Browdie," said the countryman good-humouredly, as he came slowly down in his huge top-coat. "And wa'at dost thee tak' yon place to be, noo—thot 'un ower the wa'? Ye'd never coom near it 'gin ye thried for twolve moonths. It's na' but a Poast Office! Ho! ho! They need to charge for dooble latthers. A Poast Office! Wa'at dost thee think o' thot? Ecod, if thot's on'y a Poast Office, I'd loike to see where the Lord Mayor o' Lunnun lives.

So saying, John Browdie—for he it was—opened the coach door, and tapping Mrs. Browdie, late Miss Price, on the cheek as he looked in, burst into a boisterous fit of laughter.

"Weel!" said John. "Dang my bootuns if she bean't asleep agean!"

"She's been asleep all night, and was all yesterday, except for a minute or two now and then," replied John Browdie's choice, "and I was very sorry when she woke, for she has been *so* cross!"

The subject of these remarks was a slumbering figure, so muffled in shawl and cloak, that it would have been matter of impossibility to guess at its sex but for a brown beaver bonnet and green veil which ornamented the head, and which, having been crushed and flattened, for two hundred and fifty miles, in that particular angle of the vehicle from which the lady's snores now proceeded, presented an appearance sufficiently ludicrous to have moved less risible muscles than those of John Browdie's ruddy face.

"Hollo!" cried John, twitching one end of the dragged veil. "Coom, wakken oop, will 'ee?"

After several burrowings into the old corner, and many exclamations of impatience and fatigue, the figure struggled into a sitting posture; and there, under a mass of crumpled beaver, and surrounded by a semicircle of blue curl-papers, were the delicate features of Miss Fanny Squeers.

"Oh, 'Tilda!" cried Miss Squeers, "how you have been kicking of me through this blessed night!"

"Well, I do like that," replied her friend, laughing, "when you have had nearly the whole coach to yourself."

"Don't deny it, 'Tilda," said Miss Squeers impressively, "because you have, and it's no use to go attempting to say you haven't. You mightn't have known it in your sleep, 'Tilda, but I haven't closed my eyes for a single wink, and so I *think* I am to be believed."

With which reply, Miss Squeers adjusted the bonnet and veil, which nothing but supernatural interference and an utter suspension of nature's laws could have reduced to any shape or form; and evidently flattering herself that it looked uncommonly neat, brushed off the sandwich crumbs and bits of biscuit which had accumulated in her lap, and, availing herself of John Browdie's proffered arm, descended from the coach.

"Noo," said John when a hackney coach had been called, and the ladies and the luggage hurried in, "gang to the Sarah's Head, mun."

"To the *vere?*" cried the coachman.

"Lawk, Mr. Browdie!" interrupted Miss Squeers. "The idea! Saracen's Head."

"Sure-ly," said John, "I knowed it was something aboot Sarah's Son's Head. Dost thou know thot?"

"Oh, ah! I know that," replied the coachman gruffly as he banged the door.

"'Tilda dear—really," remonstrated Miss Squeers, "we shall be taken for I don't know what."

"Let them tak' us as they foind us, said John Browdie; "we dean't come to Lunnun to do nought but 'joy oursel, do we?"

"I hope not, Mr. Browdie," replied Miss Squeers, looking singularly dismal.

"Well, then," said John, "it's no matther. I've only been a married man fower days, 'account of poor old feyther deein, and puttin' it off. Here be a weddin'-party—broide and broidesmaid, and the groom—if a mun dean't 'joy himsel noo, when ought he, hey? Drat it all, thot's what I want to know."

So, in order that he might begin to enjoy himself at once, and lose no time, Mr. Browdie gave his wife a hearty kiss, and succeeded in wresting another from Miss Squeers, after a maidenly resistance of scratching and struggling on the part of that young lady, which was not quite over when they reached the Saracen's Head.

Here the party straightway retired to rest; the refreshment of sleep being necessary after so long a journey; and here they met again about noon, to a substantial breakfast, spread, by direction of Mr. John Browdie, in a small private room up-stairs commanding an uninterrupted view of the stables.

To have seen Miss Squeers now, divested of the brown beaver, the green veil, and the blue curl-papers, and arrayed in all the virgin splendour of a white frock and spencer, with a white muslin bonnet, and an imitative damask rose in full bloom on the inside thereof: her luxuriant crop of hair arranged in curls so tight that it was impossible they could come out by any accident, and her bonnet-cap trimmed with little damask roses, which might be supposed to be so many promising scions of the big one—to have seen all this, and to have seen the broad damask belt, matching both the family rose and the little ones, which encircled her slender waist, and by a happy ingenuity took off from the shortness of the spencer behind,—to have beheld all this, and to have taken further into account the coral bracelets (rather short of beads, and with a very visible black string) which clasped her wrists, and the coral necklace which rested on her neck, supporting, outside her frock, a lonely cornelian heart, typical of her own disengaged affections—to have contemplated all these mute but expressive appeals to the purest feelings of our nature, might have thawed the frost of age, and added new and inextinguishable fuel to the fire of youth.

The waiter was touched. Waiter as he was, he had human passions and feelings, and he looked very hard at Miss Squeers as he handed the muffins.

"Is my pa in, do you know?" asked Miss Squeers with dignity.

"Beg your pardon, miss?"

"My pa," repeated Miss Squeers; "is he in?"

"In where, miss?"

"In here—in the house!" replied Miss Squeers. "My pa—Mr. Wackford Squeers—he's stopping here. Is he at home?"

"I didn't know there was any gen'l'man of that name in the house, miss," replied the waiter. "There may be in the coffee-room."

May be. Very pretty this, indeed! Here was Miss Squeers, who had been depending, all the way to London, upon showing her friends how much at home she would be, and how much respectful notice her name and connections would excite, told that her father *might* be there! "As if he was a feller!" observed Miss Squeers with emphatic indignation.

"Ye'd betther inquire, mun," said John Browdie. "An' hond up another pigeon-pie, will 'ee? Dang the chap," muttered John, looking into the empty dish as the waiter retired; "does he ca' this a pie—three yoong pigeons and a troifling matther o' steak, and a crust so loight that you doan't know when it's in your mooth, and when it's gane? I wonder hoo many pies goes to a breakfast!"

After a short interval, which John Browdie employed upon the ham and a cold round of beef, the waiter returned with another pie, and the information that Mr. Squeers was not stopping in the house, but that he came there every day, and that, directly he arrived, he should be shown up-stairs. With this he retired; and he had not retired two minutes, when he returned with Mr. Squeers and his hopeful son.

"Why, who'd have thought of this?" said Mr. Squeers, when he had saluted the party, and received some private family intelligence from his daughter.

"Who, indeed, pa!" replied that young lady spitefully. "But, you see, 'Tilda *is* married at last."

"And I stond threat for a soight o' Lunnun,

schoolmeasther," said John, vigorously attacking the pie.

"One of them things that young men do when they get married," returned Squeers; "and as runs through with their money like nothing at all! How much better wouldn't it be, now, to save it up for the eddication of any little boys, for instance! They come on you," said Mr. Squeers in a moralising way, "before you're aware of it; mine did upon me."

"Will 'ee pick a bit?" said John.

"I won't myself," returned Squeers; "but, if you'll just let little Wackford tuck into something fat, I'll be obliged to you. Give it him in his fingers, else the waiter charges it on, and there's lot of profit on this sort of vittles without that. If you hear the waiter coming, sir, shove it in your pocket, and look out of the window, d'ye hear?"

"I'm awake," replied the dutiful Wackford.

"Well," said Squeers, turning to his daughter, "it's your turn to be married next. You must make haste."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry!" said Miss Squeers very sharply.

"No, Fanny?" cried her old friend with some archness.

"No, 'Tilda," replied Miss Squeers, shaking her head vehemently. "*I* can wait."

"So can the young men, it seems, Fanny," observed Mrs. Browdie.

"They an't draw'd into it by *me*, 'Tilda," retorted Miss Squeers.

"No," returned her friend; "that's exceedingly true."

The sarcastic tone of this reply might have provoked a rather acrimonious retort from Miss Squeers, who, besides being of a constitutionally vicious temper—aggravated, just now, by travel and recent jolting—was somewhat irritated by old recollections, and the failure of her own designs upon Mr. Browdie; and the acrimonious retort might have led to a great many other retorts, which might have led to Heaven knows what, if the subject of conversation had not been, at that precise moment, accidentally changed by Mr. Squeers himself.

"What do you think?" said that gentleman. "Who do you suppose we have laid hands on, Wackford and me?"

"Pa! Not Mr. ——?" Miss Squeers was unable to finish the sentence, but Mrs. Browdie did it for her, and added, "Nickleby?"

"No," said Squeers. "But next door to him, though."

"You can't mean Smike?" cried Miss Squeers, clapping her hands.

"Yes, I can, though," rejoined her father. "I've got him, hard and fast."

"Wa'at!" exclaimed John Browdie, pushing away his plate. "Got that poor—dom'd scoondrel—where?"

"Why, in the top back-room, at my lodging," replied Squeers, "with him on one side, and the key on the other."

"At thy loodgin'! Thee'st gotten him at thy loodgin'? Ho! ho! The schoolmeasther agin all England. Give us thee hond, mun; I'm darned but I must shak' thee by the hond for thot.—Gotten him at thy loodgin'?"

"Yes," replied Squeers, staggering in his chair under the congratulatory blow on the chest which the stout Yorkshireman dealt him—"thankee. Don't do it again. You mean it kindly, I know, but it hurts rather. Yes, there he is. That's not so bad, is it?"

"Ba'ad?" repeated John Browdie. "It's eneaf to scare a mun to hear tell on."

"I thought it would surprise you a bit," said Squeers, rubbing his hands. "It was pretty neatly done, and pretty quick too."

"Hoo wor it?" inquired John, sitting down close to him. "Tell us all aboot it, mun; coom, quick!"

Although he could not keep pace with John Browdie's impatience, Mr. Squeers related the lucky chance by which Smike had fallen into his hands as quickly as he could, and, except when he was interrupted by the admiring remarks of his auditors, paused not in the recital until he had brought it to an end.

"For fear he should give me the slip by any chance," observed Squeers when he had finished, looking very cunning, "I've taken three outsides for to-morrow morning—for Wackford and him and me—and have arranged to leave the accounts and the new boys to the agent, don't you see? So it's very lucky you come to-day, or you'd have missed us; and as it is, unless you could come and tea with me to-night, we shan't see anything more of you before we go away."

"Dean't say anoother wurd," returned the Yorkshireman, shaking him by the hand. "We'd coom, if it was twonty mile."

"No, would you, though?" returned Mr. Squeers, who had not expected quite such a ready acceptance of his invitation, or he would have considered twice before he gave it.

John Browdie's only reply was another squeeze of the hand, and an assurance that they would not begin to see London till to-morrow, so that they might be at Mr. Snawley's at six o'clock without fail; and, after some further conversation, Mr. Squeers and his son departed.

During the remainder of the day Mr. Browdie was in a very odd and excitable state; bursting occasionally into an explosion of laughter, and then taking up his hat and running into the coach-yard to have it out by himself. He was very restless too, constantly walking in and out, and snapping his fingers, and dancing scraps of uncouth country dances, and, in short, conducting himself in such a very extraordinary manner, that Miss Squeers opined he was going mad, and, begging her dear 'Tilda not to distress herself, communicated her suspicions in so many words. Mrs. Browdie, however, without discovering any great alarm, observed that she had seen him so once before, and that, although he was almost sure to be ill after it, it would not be anything very serious, and therefore he was better left alone.

The result proved her to be perfectly correct; for, while they were all sitting in Mr. Snawley's parlour that night, and just as it was beginning to get dusk, John Browdie was taken so ill, and seized with such an alarming dizziness in the head, that the whole company were thrown into the utmost consternation. His good lady, indeed, was the only person present who retained presence of mind enough to observe that if he were allowed to lie down on Mr. Squeers's bed for an hour or so, and left entirely to himself, he would be sure to recover again almost as quickly as he had been taken ill. Nobody could refuse to try the effect of so reasonable a proposal before sending for a surgeon. Accordingly, John was supported up-stairs with great difficulty; being a monstrous weight, and regularly tumbling down two steps every time they hoisted him up three; and, being laid on the bed, was left in charge of his wife, who, after a short interval, reappeared in the parlour, with the gratifying intelligence that he had fallen fast asleep.

Now, the fact was that, at that particular moment, John Browdie was sitting on the bed with the reddest face ever seen, cramming the corner of the pillow into his mouth, to prevent his roaring out loud with laughter. He had no sooner succeeded in suppressing his emotion than he slipped off his shoes, and, creeping into the adjoining room where the prisoner was confined, turned the key, which was on the outside, and darting in, covered Smike's mouth with his huge hand before he could utter a sound.

"Ods-bobs, dost thee not know me, mun?" whispered the Yorkshireman to the bewildered lad. "Browdie,—chap as met thee efther schoolmeasther was banged?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Smike. "Oh, help me!"

"Help thee!" replied John, stopping his mouth again the instant he had said this much. "Thee didn't need help, if thee warn't as silly yoongster as ever draw'd breath. Wa'at did 'ee come here for, then?"

"He brought me; oh! he brought me," cried Smike.

"Brout thee!" replied John. "Why didn't 'ee punch his head, or lay theeself doon and kick, and squeal out for the pollis? I'd ha' licked a doozen such as him when I was yoong as thee. But thee be'est a poor broken-doon chap," said John sadly, "and God forgi' me for bragging ower yan o' his weakest creeturs!"

Smike opened his mouth to speak, but John Browdie stopped him.

"Stan' still," said the Yorkshireman, "and doan't 'ee speak a morsel o' talk till I tell 'ee."

With this caution, John Browdie shook his head significantly, and, drawing a screw-driver from his pocket, took off the box of the lock in a very deliberate and workmanlike manner, and laid it, together with the implement, on the floor.

"See thot?" said John. "Thot be thy doin'. Noo, coot awa'!"

Smike looked vacantly at him, as if unable to comprehend his meaning.

"I say, coot awa'," repeated John hastily. "Dost thee know where thee livest? Thee dost? Well. Are yon thy clothes, or schoolmeasther's?"

"Mine," replied Smike as the Yorkshireman hurried him to the adjoining room, and pointed out a pair of shoes and a coat which were lying on a chair.

"On wi' 'em," said John, forcing the wrong arm into the wrong sleeve, and winding the tails of the coat round the fugitive's neck. "Noo, foller me, and, when thee get'st ootside door, turn to the right, and they wean't see thee pass."

"But—but—he'll hear me shut the door," replied Smike, trembling from head to foot.

"Then dean't shut it at all," retorted John Browdie. "Dang it, thee bean't afeard o' schoolmeasther's takkin cold, I hope?"

"N-no," said Smike, his teeth chattering in his head. "But he brought me back before, and will again. He will, he will indeed."

"He wull, he wull!" replied John impatiently. "He wean't, he wean't. Lookee! I wont to do this neighbourly loike, and let them think thee's gotten awa' o' theeself, but if he cooms oot o' thot parlour awhiles theer't clearing off, he mun' have mercy on his oun boans, for I wean't. If he foinds it oot soon efther, I'll put 'un on a wrong scent, I warrant 'ee. But, if thee

keep'st a good hart, thee'lt be at whoam afore they know thee'st gotten off. Coom!"

Smike, who comprehended just enough of this to know it was intended as encouragement, prepared to follow with tottering steps, when John whispered in his ear:

"Thee'lt just tell yoong Measther that I'm sploiced to 'Tilly Price, and to be heerd on at the Saracen by latther, and that I bean't jealous of 'un. Dang it, I'm loike to boost when I think o' that neight! 'Cod, I think I see 'un now, a powderin' awa' at the thin bread-an'-butther!"

It was rather a ticklish recollection for John just then, for he was within an ace of breaking out into a loud guffaw. Restraining himself, however, just in time, by a great effort, he glided down-stairs, hauling Smike behind him; and, placing himself close to the parlour door, to confront the first person that might come out, signed to him to make off.

"DARTING IN, COVERED SMIKE'S MOUTH WITH HIS HUGE HAND BEFORE HE COULD UTTER A SOUND."

Having got so far, Smike needed no second bidding. Opening the house-door gently, and casting a look of mingled gratitude and terror at his deliverer, he took the direction which had been indicated to him, and sped away like the wind.

The Yorkshireman remained on his post for a few minutes, but, finding that there was no pause in the conversation inside, crept back again unheard, and stood, listening over the stair-rail, for a full hour. Everything remaining perfectly quiet, he got into Mr. Squeers's bed once more, and, drawing the clothes over his head, laughed till he was nearly smothered.

If there could only have been somebody by to see how the bedclothes shook, and to see the Yorkshireman's great red face and round head appear above the sheets, every now and then, like some jovial monster coming to the surface to breathe, and once more dive down convulsed with the laughter which came bursting forth afresh—that somebody would have been scarcely less amused than John Browdie himself.

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS FALLS IN LOVE. HE EMPLOYS A MEDIATOR, WHOSE PROCEEDINGS ARE CROWNED WITH UNEXPECTED SUCCESS, EXCEPTING IN ONE SOLITARY PARTICULAR.

ONCE more out of the clutches of his old persecutor, it needed no fresh stimulation to call forth the utmost energy and exertion that Smike was capable of summoning to his aid. Without pausing for a moment to reflect upon the course he was taking, or the probability of its leading him homewards or the reverse, he fled away with surprising swiftness and constancy of purpose, borne upon such wings as only Fear can wear, and impelled by imaginary shouts in the well-remembered voice of Squeers, who, with a host of pursuers, seemed to the poor fellow's disordered senses to press hard upon his track; now left at a greater distance in the rear, and now gaining faster and faster upon him, as the alternations of hope and terror agitated him by turns. Long after he had become assured that these sounds were but the creation of his excited brain, he still held on at a pace which even weakness and exhaustion could scarcely retard. It was not until the darkness and quiet of a country road recalled him to a sense of external objects, and the starry sky above warned him of the rapid flight of time, that, covered with dust and panting for breath, he stopped to listen and look about him.

All was still and silent. A glare of light in the distance, casting a warm glow upon the sky, marked where the huge city lay. Solitary fields, divided by hedges and ditches, through many of which he had crashed and scrambled in his flight, skirted the road, both by the way he had come and upon the opposite side. It was late now. They could scarcely trace him by such paths as he had taken, and, if he could hope to regain his own dwelling, it must surely be at such a time as that, and under cover of the darkness. This, by degrees, became pretty plain, even to the mind of Smike. He had, at first, entertained some vague and childish idea of travelling into the country for ten or a dozen miles, and then returning homewards by a wide circuit, which should keep him clear of London—so great was his apprehension of traversing the streets alone, lest he should again encounter his dreaded enemy—but, yielding to the conviction which these thoughts inspired, he turned back, and taking the open road, though not without many fears and misgivings, made for London again, with scarcely less speed of foot than that with which he had left the temporary abode of Mr. Squeers.

By the time he re-entered it, at the western extremity, the greater part of the shops were closed. Of the throngs of people who had been tempted abroad after the heat of the day, but few remained in the streets, and they were lounging home. But of these he asked his way from time to time, and, by dint of repeated inquiries, he at length reached the dwelling of Newman Noggs.

All that evening Newman had been hunting and searching in by-ways and corners for the very person who now knocked at his door, while Nicholas had been pursuing the same inquiry in other directions. He was sitting, with a melancholy air, at his poor supper, when Smike's timorous and uncertain knock reached his ears. Alive to every sound in his anxious and expectant state, Newman hurried down-stairs, and, uttering a cry of joyful surprise, dragged the welcome visitor into the passage and up the stairs, and said not a word until he had him safe in his own garret, and the door was shut behind them, when he mixed a great mug-full of gin-and-water, and holding it to Smike's mouth, as one might hold a bowl of medicine to the lips of a refractory child, commanded him to drain it to the last drop.

Newman looked uncommonly blank when he found that Smike did little more than put his lips to the precious mixture; he was in the act of raising the mug to his own mouth with a deep sigh of compassion for his poor friend's weakness, when Smike, beginning to relate the adventures which had befallen him, arrested him halfway, and he stood listening, with the mug in his hand.

It was odd enough to see the change that came over Newman as Smike proceeded. At first he stood rubbing his lips with the back of his hand, as a preparatory ceremony towards composing himself for a draught; then, at the mention of Squeers, he took the mug under his arm, and opening his eyes very wide, looked on in the utmost astonishment. When Smike came to the assault upon himself in the hackney coach, he hastily deposited the mug upon the table, and limped up and down the room in a state of the greatest excitement, stopping himself with a jerk, every now and then, as if to listen more attentively. When John Browdie came to be spoken of, he dropped, by slow and gradual degrees, into a chair, and rubbing his hands upon his knees—quicker and quicker as the story reached its climax—burst, at last, into a laugh composed of one loud sonorous "Ha! ha!" having given

vent to which, his countenance immediately fell again as he inquired, with the utmost anxiety, whether it was probable that John Browdie and Squeers had come to blows.

"No! I think not," replied Smike. "I don't think he could have missed me till I had got quite away."

Newman scratched his head with a show of great disappointment, and, once more lifting up the mug, applied himself to the contents; smiling meanwhile, over the rim, with a grim and ghastly smile at Smike.

"You shall stay here," said Newman; "you're tired—fagged. I'll tell them you're come back. They have been half mad about you. Mr. Nicholas——"

"God bless him!" cried Smike.

"Amen!" returned Newman. "He hasn't had a minute's rest or peace; no more has the old lady, nor Miss Nickleby."

"No, no! Has *she* thought about me?" said Smike. "Has she, though? Oh! has she—has she? Don't tell me so if she has not."

"She has," cried Newman. "She is as noble-hearted as she is beautiful."

"Yes, yes!" cried Smike. "Well said!"

"So mild and gentle," said Newman.

"Yes, yes!" cried Smike with increasing eagerness.

"And yet with such a true and gallant spirit," pursued Newman.

He was going on in his enthusiasm, when, chancing to look at his companion, he saw that he had covered his face with his hands, and that tears were stealing out between his fingers.

A moment before, the boy's eyes were sparkling with unwonted fire, and every feature had been lighted up with an excitement which made him appear, for the moment, quite a different being.

"Well, well!" muttered Newman as if he were a little puzzled. "It has touched *me*, more than once, to think such a nature should have been exposed to such trials; this poor fellow—yes, yes—he feels that too—it softens him—makes him think of his former misery. Hah! That's it? Yes, that's—hum!"

It was by no means clear, from the tone of these broken reflections, that Newman Noggs considered them as explaining, at all satisfactorily, the emotion which had suggested them. He sat, in a musing attitude, for some time, regarding Smike occasionally with an anxious and doubtful glance, which sufficiently showed that he was not very remotely connected with his thoughts.

At length he repeated his proposition that Smike should remain where he was for that night, and that he (Noggs) should straightway repair to the cottage to relieve the suspense of the family. But, as Smike would not hear of this—pleading his anxiety to see his friends again—they eventually sallied forth together; and the night being, by this time, far advanced, and Smike being, besides, so footsore that he could hardly crawl along, it was within an hour of sunrise when they reached their destination.

At the first sound of their voices outside the house, Nicholas, who had passed a sleepless night, devising schemes for the recovery of his lost charge, started from his bed, and joyfully admitted them. There was so much noisy conversation, and congratulation, and indignation, that the remainder of the family were soon awakened, and Smike received a warm and cordial welcome, not only from Kate, but from Mrs. Nickleby also, who assured him of her future favour and regard, and was so obliging as to relate, for his entertainment and that of the assembled circle, a most remarkable account, extracted from some work the name of which she had never known, of a miraculous escape from some prison, but what one she couldn't remember, effected by an officer whose name she had forgotten, confined for some crime which she didn't clearly recollect.

At first Nicholas was disposed to give his uncle credit for some portion of this bold attempt (which had so nearly proved successful) to carry off Smike; but, on more mature consideration, he was inclined to think that the full merit of it rested with Mr. Squeers. Determined to ascertain, if he could, through John Browdie, how the case really stood, he betook himself to his daily occupation: meditating, as he went, on a great variety of schemes for the punishment of the Yorkshire schoolmaster, all of which had their foundation in the strictest principles of retributive justice, and had but the one drawback of being wholly impracticable.

"A fine morning, Mr. Linkinwater!" said Nicholas, entering the office.

"Ah!" replied Tim, "talk of the country, indeed! What do you think of this, now, for a day—a London day—eh?"

"It's a little clearer out of town," said Nicholas.

"Clearer!" echoed Tim Linkinwater. "You should see it from my bedroom window."

"You should see it from *mine*," replied Nicholas with a smile.

"Pooh! pooh!" said Tim Linkinwater, "don't tell me. Country!" (Bow was quite a rustic place to Tim.) "Nonsense! What can you get in the country but new-laid eggs and flowers?

I can buy new-laid eggs in Leadenhall Market, any morning before breakfast; and as to flowers, it's worth a run up-stairs to smell my mignonette, or to see the double wallflower in the back-attic window, at No. 6, in the court."

"There is a double wallflower at No. 6, in the court, is there?" said Nicholas.

"Yes, is there!" replied Tim, "and planted in a cracked jug, without a spout. There were hyacinths there, this last spring, blossoming in—— But you will laugh at that, of course."

"At what?"

"At their blossoming in old blacking bottles," said Tim.

"Not I, indeed," returned Nicholas.

Tim looked wistfully at him for a moment, as if he were encouraged by the tone of this reply to be more communicative on the subject; and sticking behind his ear a pen that he had been making, and shutting up his knife with a smart click, said:

"They belong to a sickly, bedridden, hump-backed boy, and seem to be the only pleasure, Mr. Nickleby, of his sad existence. How many years is it," said Tim, pondering, "since I first noticed him, quite a little child, dragging himself about on a pair of tiny crutches? Well! Well! Not many; but though they would appear nothing, if I thought of other things, they seem a long, long time, when I think of him. It is a sad thing," said Tim, breaking off, "to see a little deformed child sitting apart from other children, who are active and merry, watching the games he is denied the power to share in. He made my heart ache very often."

"It is a good heart," said Nicholas, "that disentangles itself from the close avocations of every day, to heed such things. You were saying——"

"That the flowers belonged to this poor boy," said Tim; "that's all. When it is fine weather, and he can crawl out of bed, he draws a chair close to the window, and sits there, looking at them and arranging them, all day long. We used to nod, at first, and then we came to speak. Formerly, when I called to him of a morning, and asked him how he was, he would smile, and say, 'Better;' but now he shakes his head, and only bends more closely over his old plants. It must be dull to watch the dark housetops and the flying clouds for so many months; but he is very patient."

"Is there nobody in the house to cheer or help him?" asked Nicholas.

"His father lives there, I believe," replied Tim, "and other people too; but no one seems to care much for the poor sickly cripple. I have asked him, very often, if I can do nothing for him; his answer is always the same,—'Nothing.' His voice is growing weak of late, but I can *see* that he makes the old reply. He can't leave his bed now, so they have moved it close beside the window, and there he lies all day: now looking at the sky, and now at his flowers, which he still makes shift to trim and water with his own thin hands. At night, when he sees my candle, he draws back his curtain, and leaves it so till I am in bed. It seems such company to him to know that I am there, that I often sit at my window for an hour or more, that he may see I am still awake; and sometimes I get up in the night to look at the dull melancholy light in his little room, and wonder whether he is awake or sleeping.

"The night will not be long coming," said Tim, "when he will sleep, and never wake again on earth. We have never so much as shaken hands in all our lives; and yet I shall miss him like an old friend. Are there any country flowers that could interest me like these, do you think? Or do you suppose that the withering of a hundred kinds of the choicest flowers that blow, called by the hardest Latin names that were ever invented, would give me one fraction of the pain that I shall feel when these old jugs and bottles are swept away as lumber? Country!" cried Tim with a contemptuous emphasis; "don't you know that I couldn't have such a court under my bedroom window anywhere but in London?"

With which inquiry, Tim turned his back, and, pretending to be absorbed in his accounts, took an opportunity of hastily wiping his eyes when he supposed Nicholas was looking another way.

Whether it was that Tim's accounts were more than usually intricate that morning, or whether it was that his habitual serenity had been a little disturbed by these recollections, it so happened that when Nicholas returned from executing some commission, and inquired whether Mr. Charles Cheeryble was alone in his room, Tim promptly, and without the smallest hesitation, replied in the affirmative, although somebody had passed into the room not ten minutes before, and Tim took especial and particular pride in preventing any intrusion on either of the brothers when they were engaged with any visitor whatever.

"I'll take this letter to him at once," said Nicholas, "if that's the case." And, with that, he walked to the room and knocked at the door.

No answer.

Another knock, and still no answer.

"He can't be here," thought Nicholas. "I'll lay it on his table."

So, Nicholas opened the door and walked in; and very quickly he turned to walk out again, when he saw, to his great astonishment and discomfiture, a young lady upon her knees at Mr. Cheeryble's feet, and Mr. Cheeryble beseeching her to rise, and entreating a third person, who had the appearance of the young lady's female attendant, to add her persuasions to his to induce her to do so.

Nicholas stammered out an awkward apology, and was precipitately retiring, when the young lady, turning her head a little, presented to his view the features of the lovely girl whom he had seen at the register office on his first visit long before. Glancing from her to the attendant, he recognised the same clumsy servant who had accompanied her then; and between his admiration of the young lady's beauty, and the confusion and surprise of this unexpected recognition, he stood stock-still, in such a bewildered state of surprise and embarrassment that, for the moment, he was quite bereft of the power either to speak or move.

"My dear ma'am—my dear young lady," cried brother Charles in violent agitation, "pray don't—not another word, I beseech and entreat you! I implore you—I beg of you—to rise. We—we—are not alone."

As he spoke, he raised the young lady, who staggered to a chair and swooned away.

"She has fainted, sir," said Nicholas, darting eagerly forward.

"Poor dear, poor dear!" cried brother Charles. "Where is my brother Ned? Ned, my dear brother, come here, pray."

"Brother Charles, my dear fellow," replied his brother, hurrying into the room, "what is the—ah! what——"

"Hush! hush!—not a word for your life, brother Ned," returned the other. "Ring for the housekeeper, my dear brother—call Tim Linkinwater! Here, Tim Linkinwater, sir—Mr. Nickleby, my dear sir, leave the room, I beg and beseech of you."

"I think she is better now," said Nicholas, who had been watching the patient so eagerly, that he had not heard the request.

"Poor bird!" cried brother Charles, gently taking her hand in his, and laying her head upon his arm. "Brother Ned, my dear fellow, you will be surprised, I know, to witness this, in business hours; but——" Here he was again reminded of the presence of Nicholas, and, shaking him by the hand, earnestly requested him to leave the room, and to send Tim Linkinwater without an instant's delay.

Nicholas immediately withdrew, and, on his way to the counting-house, met both the old housekeeper and Tim Linkinwater, jostling each other in the passage, and hurrying to the scene of action with extraordinary speed. Without waiting to hear his message, Tim Linkinwater darted into the room, and presently afterwards Nicholas heard the door shut and locked on the inside.

He had abundance of time to ruminate on this discovery, for Tim Linkinwater was absent during the greater part of an hour, during the whole of which time Nicholas thought of nothing but the young lady, and her exceeding beauty, and what could possibly have brought her there, and why they made such a mystery of it. The more he thought of all this, the more it perplexed him, and the more anxious he became to know who and what she was. "I should have known her among ten thousand," thought Nicholas. And, with that, he walked up and down the room, and recalling her face and figure (of which he had a peculiarly vivid remembrance), discarded all other subjects of reflection, and dwelt upon that alone.

At length Tim Linkinwater came back—provokingly cool, and with papers in his hand, and a pen in his mouth, as if nothing had happened.

"Is she quite recovered?" said Nicholas impetuously.

"Who?" returned Tim Linkinwater.

"Who!" repeated Nicholas. "The young lady."

"What do you make, Mr. Nickleby," said Tim, taking his pen out of his mouth, "what do you make of four hundred and twenty-seven times three thousand two hundred and thirty-eight?"

"Nay," returned Nicholas, "what do you make of my question first? I asked you——"

"About the young lady," said Tim Linkinwater, putting on his spectacles. "To be sure. Yes. Oh! she's very well."

"Very well, is she?" returned Nicholas.

"*Very* well," replied Mr. Linkinwater gravely.

"Will she be able to go home to-day?" asked Nicholas.

"She's gone," said Tim.

"Gone!"

"Yes."

"I hope she has not far to go?" said Nicholas, looking earnestly at the other.

"Ay," replied the immovable Tim, "I hope she hasn't."

Nicholas hazarded one or two further remarks, but it was evident that Tim Linkinwater had his own reasons for evading the subject, and that he was determined to afford no further informa-

tion respecting the fair unknown, who had awakened so much curiosity in the breast of his young friend. Nothing daunted by this repulse, Nicholas returned to the charge next day, emboldened by the circumstance of Mr. Linkinwater being in a very talkative and communicative mood; but, directly he resumed the theme, Tim relapsed into a state of most provoking taciturnity, and, from answering in monosyllables, came to returning no answers at all, save such as were to be inferred from several grave nods and shrugs, which only served to whet that appetite for intelligence in Nicholas which had alreday attained a most unreasonable height.

Foiled in these attempts, he was fain to content himself with watching for the young lady's next visit, but here again he was disappointed. Day after day passed, and she did not return. He looked eagerly at the superscription of all the notes and letters, but there was not one among them which he could fancy to be in her handwriting. On two or three occasions he was employed on business which took him to a distance, and had formerly been transacted by Tim Linkinwater. Nicholas could not help suspecting that, for some reason or other, he was sent out of the way on purpose, and that the young lady was there in his absence. Nothing transpired, however, to confirm this suspicion, and Tim could not be entrapped into any confession or admission tending to support it in the smallest degree.

Mystery and disappointment are not absolutely indispensable to the growth of love, but they are, very often, its powerful auxiliaries. "Out of sight, out of mind," is well enough as a proverb applicable to cases of friendship, though absence is not always necessary to hollowness of heart, even between friends, and truth and honesty, like precious stones, are perhaps most easily imitated at a distance, when the counterfeits often pass for real. Love, however, is very materially assisted by a warm and active imagination: which has a long memory, and will thrive, for a considerable time, on very slight and sparing food. Thus it is that it often attains its most luxuriant growth in separation, and under circumstances of the utmost difficulty; and thus it was that Nicholas, thinking of nothing but the unknown young lady, from day to day and from hour to hour, began, at last, to think that he was very desperately in love with her, and that never was such an ill-used and persecuted lover as he.

Still, though he loved and languished after the most orthodox models, and was only deterred from making a confidante of Kate by the slight considerations of having never, in all his life, spoken to the object of his passion, and having never set eyes upon her, except on two occasions, on both of which she had come and gone like a flash of lightning—or, as Nicholas himself said, in the numerous conversations he held with himself, like a vision of youth and beauty much too bright to last—his ardour and devotion remained without its reward. The young lady appeared no more; so there was a great deal of love wasted (enough, indeed, to have set up half-a-dozen young gentlemen, as times go, with the utmost decency), and nobody was a bit the wiser for it; not even Nicholas himself, who, on the contrary, became more dull, sentimental, and lackadaisical every day.

While matters were in this state, the failure of a correspondent of the brothers Cheeryble, in Germany, imposed upon Tim Linkinwater and Nicholas the necessity of going through some very long and complicated accounts, extending over a considerable space of time. To get through them with the greater dispatch, Tim Linkinwater proposed that they should remain at the counting-house, for a week or so, until ten o'clock at night. To this, as nothing damped the zeal of Nicholas in the service of his kind patrons—not even romance, which has seldom business habits—he cheerfully assented. On the very first night of these later hours, at nine exactly, there came, not the young lady herself, but her servant, who, being closeted with brother Charles for some time, went away, and returned next night at the same hour, and on the next, and on the next again.

These repeated visits inflamed the curiosity of Nicholas to the very highest pitch. Tantalised and excited beyond all bearing, and unable to fathom the mystery without neglecting his duty, he confided the whole secret to Newman Noggs, imploring him to be on the watch next night; to follow the girl home; to set on foot such inquiries relative to the name, condition, and history of her mistress, as he could, without exciting suspicion; and to report the result to him with the least possible delay.

Beyond all measure proud of this commission, Newman Noggs took up his post in the square, on the following evening, a full hour before the needful time, and planting himself behind the pump, and pulling his hat over his eyes, began his watch with an elaborate appearance of mystery, admirably calculated to excite the suspicion of all beholders. Indeed, divers servant-girls who came to draw water, and sundry little boys who stopped to drink at the ladle, were almost scared out of their senses by the apparition of Newman

Noggs looking stealthily round the pump, with nothing of him visible but his face, and that wearing the expression of a meditative Ogre.

Punctual to her time, the messenger came again, and, after an interview of rather longer duration than usual, departed. Newman had made two appointments with Nicholas: one for the next evening, conditional on his success: and one the next night following, which was to be kept under all circumstances. The first night he was not at the place of meeting (a certain tavern about half-way between the City and Golden Square), but on the second night he was there before Nicholas, and received him with open arms.

"It's all right," whispered Newman. "Sit down—sit down, there's a dear young man, and let me tell you all about it."

Nicholas needed no second invitation, and eagerly inquired what was the news.

"There's a great deal of news," said Newman in a flutter of exultation. "It's all right. Don't be anxious. I don't know where to begin. Never mind that. Keep up your spirits. It's all right."

"Well?" said Nicholas eagerly. "Yes?"

"Yes," replied Newman. "That's it."

"What's it?" said Nicholas. "The name—the name, my dear fellow!"

"The name's Bobster," replied Newman.

"Bobster!" repeated Nicholas indignantly.

"That's the name," said Newman. "I remember it by lobster."

"Bobster!" repeated Nicholas more emphatically than before. "That must be the servant's name."

"No, it an't," said Newman, shaking his head with great positiveness. "Miss Cecilia Bobster."

"Cecilia, eh?" returned Nicholas, muttering the two names together over and over again in every variety of tone, to try the effect. "Well, Cecilia is a pretty name."

"Very. And a pretty creature too," said Newman.

"Who?" said Nicholas.

"Miss Bobster."

"Why, where have you seen her?" demanded Nicholas.

"Never mind, my dear boy," retorted Noggs, clapping him on the shoulder. "I *have* seen her. You shall see her. I've managed it all."

"My dear Newman," cried Nicholas, grasping his hand, "are you serious?"

"I am," replied Newman. "I mean it all. Every word. You shall see her to-morrow night. She consents to hear you speak for yourself. I persuaded her. She is all affability, goodness, sweetness, and beauty."

"I know she is; I know she must be, Newman!" said Nicholas, wringing his hand.

"You are right," returned Newman.

"Where does she live?" cried Nicholas. "What have you learnt of her history? Has she a father—mother—any brothers—sisters? What did she say? How came you to see her? Was she not very much surprised? Did you say how passionately I have longed to speak to her? Did you tell her where I had seen her? Did you tell her how, and when, and where, and how long, and how often, I have thought of that sweet face which came upon me in my bitterest distress like a glimpse of some better world—did you, Newman—did you?"

Poor Noggs literally gasped for breath as this flood of questions rushed upon him, and moved spasmodically in his chair at every fresh inquiry, staring at Nicholas meanwhile with a most ludicrous expression of perplexity.

"No," said Newman, "I didn't tell her that."

"Didn't tell her which?" asked Nicholas.

"About the glimpse of the better world," said Newman. "I didn't tell her who you were, either, or where you'd seen her. I said you loved her to distraction."

"That's true, Newman," replied Nicholas with his characteristic vehemence. "Heaven knows I do!"

"I said, too, that you had admired her for a long time in secret," said Newman.

"Yes, yes. What did she say to that?" asked Nicholas.

"Blushed," said Newman.

"To be sure! Of course she would," said Nicholas approvingly.

Newman then went on to say that the young lady was an only child, that her mother was dead, that she resided with her father, and that she had been induced to allow her lover a secret interview at the intercession of her servant, who had great influence with her. He further related how it required much moving and great eloquence to bring the young lady to this pass; how it was expressly understood that she merely afforded Nicholas an opportunity of declaring his passion; and how she by no means pledged herself to be favourably impressed with his attentions. The mystery of her visits to the brothers Cheeryble remained wholly unexplained, for Newman had not alluded to them, either in his preliminary conversations with the servant or his subsequent interview with the mistress, merely remarking that he had been instructed to watch the girl home and plead his young friend's cause, and not saying how far he had followed her, or from what point. But

Newman hinted that, from what had fallen from the confidante, he had been led to suspect that the young lady led a very miserable and unhappy life, under the strict control of her only parent, who was of a violent and brutal temper —a circumstance which he thought might in some degree account both for her having sought the protection and friendship of the brothers, and her suffering herself to be prevailed upon to grant the promised interview. The last he held to be a very logical deduction from the premises, inasmuch as it was but natural to

THE MEDITATIVE OGRE.

suppose that a young lady, whose present condition was so unenviable, would be more than commonly desirous to change it.

It appeared, on further questioning—for it was only by a very long and arduous process that all this could be got out of Newman Noggs —that Newman, in explanation of his shabby appearance, had represented himself as being, for certain wise and indispensable purposes connected with that intrigue, in disguise; and, being questioned how he had come to exceed his commission so far as to procure an interview,

he responded that, the lady appearing willing to grant it, he considered himself bound, both in duty and gallantry, to avail himself of such a golden means of enabling Nicholas to prosecute his addresses. After these and all possible questions had been asked and answered twenty times over, they parted, undertaking to meet on the following night at half-past ten, for the purpose of fulfilling the appointment; which was for eleven o'clock.

"Things come about very strangely!" thought Nicholas as he walked home. "I never contemplated anything of this kind; never dreamt of the possibility of it. To know something of the life of one in whom I felt such interest; to see her in the street, to pass the house in which she lived, to meet her sometimes in her walks, to hope that a day might come when I might be in a condition to tell her of my love, this was the utmost extent of my thoughts. Now, however—— But I should be a fool indeed to repine at my own good fortune!"

Still, Nicholas was dissatisfied; and there was more in the dissatisfaction than mere revulsion of feeling. He was angry with the young lady for being so easily won, "because," reasoned Nicholas, "it is not as if she knew it was I, but it might have been anybody,"—which was certainly not pleasant. The next moment he was angry with himself for entertaining such thoughts, arguing that nothing but goodness could dwell in such a temple, and that the behaviour of the brothers sufficiently showed the estimation in which they held her. "The fact is, she's a mystery altogether," said Nicholas. This was not more satisfactory than his previous course of reflection, and only drove him out upon a new sea of speculation and conjecture, where he tossed and tumbled, in great discomfort of mind, until the clock struck ten, and the hour of meeting drew nigh.

Nicholas had dressed himself with great care, and even Newman Noggs had trimmed himself up a little; his coat presenting the phenomenon of two consecutive buttons, and the supplementary pins being inserted at tolerably regular intervals. He wore his hat, too, in the newest taste, with a pocket-handkerchief in the crown, and a twisted end of it straggling out behind after the fashion of a pigtail, though he could scarcely lay claim to the ingenuity of inventing this latter decoration, inasmuch as he was utterly unconscious of it: being in a nervous and excited condition which rendered him quite insensible to everything but the great object of the expedition.

They traversed the streets in profound silence; and, after walking at a round pace for some distance, arrived in one, of a gloomy appearance and very little frequented, near the Edgeware Road.

"Number Twelve," said Newman.

"Oh!" replied Nicholas, looking about him.

"Good street?" said Newman.

"Yes," returned Nicholas. "Rather dull."

Newman made no answer to this remark, but, halting abruptly, planted Nicholas with his back to some area railings, and gave him to understand that he was to wait there, without moving hand or foot, until it was satisfactorily ascertained that the coast was clear. This done, Noggs limped away with great alacrity; looking over his shoulder every instant, to make quite certain that Nicholas was obeying his directions; and, ascending the steps of a house some half-dozen doors off, was lost to view.

After a short delay he reappeared, and, limping back again, halted midway, and beckoned Nicholas to follow him.

"Well?" said Nicholas, advancing towards him on tiptoe.

"All right," replied Newman in high glee. "All ready; nobody at home. Couldn't be better. Ha! ha!"

With this fortifying assurance, he stole past a street-door, on which Nicholas caught a glimpse of a brass plate, with "Bobster" in very large letters; and, stopping at the area gate, which was open, signed to his young friend to descend.

"What the devil!" cried Nicholas, drawing back. "Are we to sneak into the kitchen, as if we came after the forks?"

"Hush!" replied Newman. "Old Bobster—ferocious Turk. He'd kill 'em all—box the young lady's ears—he does—often."

"What!" cried Nicholas in high wrath, "do you mean to tell me that any man would dare to box the ears of such a——"

He had no time to sing the praises of his mistress just then, for Newman gave him a gentle push, which had nearly precipitated him to the bottom of the area steps. Thinking it best to take the hint in good part, Nicholas descended without further remonstrance, but with a countenance bespeaking anything rather than the hope and rapture of a passionate lover. Newman followed—he would have followed head first, but for the timely assistance of Nicholas—and, taking his hand, led him through a stone passage, profoundly dark, into a back-kitchen or cellar, of the blackest and most pitchy obscurity, where they stopped.

"Well!" said Nicholas in a discontented whisper, "this is not all, I suppose, is it?"

"No, no," rejoined Noggs; "they'll be here directly. It's all right."

"I am glad to hear it," said Nicholas. "I shouldn't have thought it, I confess."

They exchanged no further words, and there Nicholas stood, listening to the loud breathing of Newman Noggs, and imagining that his nose seemed to glow like a red-hot coal, even in the midst of the darkness which enshrouded them. Suddenly the sound of cautious footsteps attracted his ear, and directly afterwards a female voice inquired if the gentleman was there.

"Yes," replied Nicholas, turning towards the corner from which the voice proceeded. "Who is that?"

"Only me, sir," replied the voice. "Now, if you please, ma'am."

A gleam of light shone into the place, and presently the servant-girl appeared, bearing a light, and followed by her young mistress, who seemed to be overwhelmed by modesty and confusion.

At sight of the young lady, Nicholas started and changed colour; his heart beat violently, and he stood rooted to the spot. At that instant, and almost simultaneously with her arrival and that of the candle, there was heard a loud and furious knocking at the street-door, which caused Newman Noggs to jump up, with great agility, from a beer barrel on which he had been seated astride, and to exclaim abruptly, and with a face of ashy paleness, "Bobster, by the Lord!"

The young lady shrieked, the attendant wrung her hands, Nicholas gazed from one to the other in apparent stupefaction, and Newman hurried to and fro, thrusting his hands into all his pockets successively, and drawing out the linings of every one in the excess of his irresolution. It was but a moment, but the confusion crowded into that one moment no imagination can exaggerate.

"Leave the house, for Heaven's sake! We have done wrong—we deserve it all!" cried the young lady. "Leave the house, or I am ruined and undone for ever!"

"Will you hear me say but one word?" cried Nicholas. "Only one. I will not detain you. Will you hear me say one word in explanation of this mischance?"

But Nicholas might as well have spoken to the wind, for the young lady, with distracted looks, hurried up the stairs. He would have followed her, but Newman, twisting his hand in his coat collar, dragged him towards the passage by which they had entered.

"Let me go, Newman, in the Devil's name!" cried Nicholas. "I must speak to her—I will! I will not leave this house without."

"Reputation — character — violence — consider," said Newman, clinging round him with both arms, and hurrying him away. "Let them open the door. We'll go, as we came, directly it's shut. Come. This way. Here."

Overpowered by the remonstrances of Newman, and the tears and prayers of the girl, and the tremendous knocking above, which had never ceased, Nicholas allowed himself to be hurried off; and, precisely as Mr. Bobster made his entrance by the street-door, he and Noggs made their exit by the area gate.

They hurried away, through several streets, without stopping or speaking. At last they halted, and confronted each other with blank and rueful faces.

"Never mind," said Newman, gasping for breath. "Don't be cast down. It's all right. More fortunate next time. It couldn't be helped. I did *my* part."

"Excellently," replied Nicholas, taking his hand. "Excellently, and like the true and zealous friend you are. Only—mind, I am not disappointed, Newman, and feel just as much indebted to you—only *it was the wrong lady*."

"Eh?" cried Newman Noggs. "Taken in by the servant?"

"Newman, Newman," said Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder: "it was the wrong servant too."

Newman's under jaw dropped, and he gazed at Nicholas, with his sound eye fixed fast and motionless in his head.

"Don't take it to heart," said Nicholas; "it's of no consequence; you see I don't care about it; you followed the wrong person, that's all."

That *was* all. Whether Newman Noggs had looked round the pump, in a slanting direction, so long, that his sight became impaired; or whether, finding that there was time to spare, he had recruited himself with a few drops of something stronger than the pump could yield—by whatsoever means it had come to pass, this was his mistake. And Nicholas went home to brood upon it, and to meditate upon the charms of the unknown young lady, now as far beyond his reach as ever.

CHAPTER XLI.

CONTAINING SOME ROMANTIC PASSAGES BETWEEN MRS. NICKLEBY AND THE GENTLEMAN IN THE SMALL-CLOTHES NEXT DOOR.

EVER since her last momentous conversation with her son, Mrs. Nickleby had begun to display unusual care in the adornment of her person, gradually superadding to

those staid and matronly habiliments which had, up to that time, formed her ordinary attire, a variety of embellishments and decorations, slight, perhaps, in themselves, but, taken together, and considered with reference to the subject of her disclosure, of no mean importance. Even her black dress assumed something of a deadly-lively air from the jaunty style in which it was worn; and eked out, as its lingering attractions were, by a prudent disposal, here and there, of certain juvenile ornaments of little or no value, which had, for that reason alone, escaped the general wreck, and been permitted to slumber peacefully in odd corners of old drawers and boxes where daylight seldom shone, her mourning garments assumed quite a new character. From being the outward tokens of respect and sorrow for the dead, they became converted into signals of very slaughterous and killing designs upon the living.

Mrs. Nickleby might have been stimulated to this proceeding by a lofty sense of duty, and impulses of unquestionable excellence. She might, by this time, have become impressed with the sinfulness of long indulgence in unavailing woe, or the necessity of setting a proper example of neatness and decorum to her blooming daughter. Considerations of duty and responsibility apart, the change might have taken its rise in feelings of the purest and most disinterested charity. The gentleman next door had been vilified by Nicholas; rudely stigmatised as a dotard and an idiot; and, for these attacks upon his understanding, Mrs. Nickleby was, in some sort, accountable. She might have felt that it was the act of a good Christian to show, by all means in her power, that the abused gentleman was neither the one nor the other. And what better means could she adopt, towards so virtuous and laudable an end, than proving to all men, in her own person, that his passion was the most rational and reasonable in the world, and just the very result, of all others, which discreet and thinking persons might have foreseen, from her incautiously displaying her matured charms, without reserve, under the very eye, as it were, of an ardent and too-susceptible man?

"Ah!" said Mrs. Nickleby, gravely shaking her head; "if Nicholas knew what his poor dear papa suffered before we were engaged, when I used to hate him, he would have a little more feeling. Shall I ever forget the morning I looked scornfully at him when he offered to carry my parasol? Or that night when I frowned at him? It was a mercy he didn't emigrate. It very nearly drove him to it."

Whether the deceased might not have been better off if he had emigrated in his bachelor days, was a question which his relict did not stop to consider; for Kate entered the room, with her workbox, in this stage of her reflections; and a much slighter interruption, or no interruption at all, would have diverted Mrs. Nickleby's thoughts into a new channel at any time.

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't know how it is, but a fine warm summer day like this, with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig, with sage-and-onion sauce, and made gravy."

"That's a curious association of ideas, is it not, mamma?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," replied Mrs. Nickleby. "Roast pig—let me see. On the day five weeks after you were christened we had a roast—no, that couldn't have been a pig, either, because I recollect there were a pair of them to carve, and your poor papa and I could never have thought of sitting down to two pigs—they must have been partridges. Roast pig! I hardly think we ever could have had one, now I come to remember, for your papa could never bear the sight of them in the shops, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions; and he had a horror of little babies, too, because he couldn't very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject. It's very odd, now, what can have put that in my head! I recollect dining once at Mrs. Bevan's, in that broad street round the corner by the coach-maker's, where the tipsy man fell through the cellar-flap of an empty house nearly a week before the quarter-day, and wasn't found till the new tenant went in—and we had roast pig there. It must be that, I think, that reminds me of it, especially as there was a little bird in the room that would keep on singing all the time of dinner—at least, not a little bird, for it was a parrot, and he didn't sing exactly, for he talked and swore dreadfully: but I think it must be that. Indeed, I am sure it must. Shouldn't you say so, my dear?"

"I should say there was not a doubt about it, mamma," returned Kate with a cheerful smile.

"No; but *do* you think so, Kate?" said Mrs. Nickleby with as much gravity as if it were a question of the most imminent and thrilling interest. "If you don't, say so at once, you know; because it's just as well to be correct, particularly on a point of this kind, which is very curious, and worth settling while one thinks about it."

Kate laughingly replied that she was quite

convinced; and, as her mamma still appeared undetermined whether it was not absolutely essential that the subject should be renewed, proposed that they should take their work into the summer-house, and enjoy the beauty of the afternoon. Mrs. Nickleby readily assented, and to the summer-house they repaired without further discussion.

"Well, I will say," observed Mrs. Nickleby as she took her seat, "that there never was such a good creature as Smike. Upon my word, the pains he has taken in putting this little arbour to rights, and training the sweetest flowers about it, are beyond anything I could have—— I wish he wouldn't put *all* the gravel on your side, Kate, my dear, though, and leave nothing but mould for me."

"Dear mamma," returned Kate hastily, "take this seat—do—to oblige me, mamma."

"No, indeed, my dear. I shall keep my own side," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Well! I declare!"

Kate looked up inquiringly.

"If he hasn't been," said Mrs. Nickleby, "and got, from somewhere or other, a couple of roots of those flowers that I said I was so fond of the other night, and asked you if you were not—no, that *you* said *you* were so fond of the other night, and asked me if I wasn't—it's the same thing. Now, upon my word, I take that as very kind and attentive indeed! I don't see," added Mrs. Nickleby, looking narrowly about her, "any of them on my side, but I suppose they grow best near the gravel. You may depend upon it they do, Kate, and that's the reason they are all near you, and he has put the gravel there because it's the sunny side. Upon my word, that's very clever, now! I shouldn't have had half as much thought myself!"

"Mamma," said Kate, bending over her work so that her face was almost hidden, "before you were married——"

"Dear me, Kate," interrupted Mrs. Nickleby, "what in the name of goodness graciousness makes you fly off to the time before I was married, when I'm talking to you about his thoughtfulness and attention to me? You don't seem to take the smallest interest in the garden."

"Oh, mamma!" said Kate, raising her face again, "you know I do."

"Well, then, my dear, why don't you praise the neatness and prettiness with which it's kept?" said Mrs. Nickleby. "How very odd you are, Kate!"

"I do praise it, mamma," answered Kate gently. "Poor fellow!"

"I scarcely ever hear you, my dear," retorted Mrs. Nickleby; "that's all I've got to say." By this time the good lady had been a long while upon one topic, so she fell at once into her daughter's little trap—if trap it were—and inquired what she had been going to say.

"About what, mamma?" said Kate, who had apparently quite forgotten her diversion.

"Lor, Kate, my dear," returned her mother, "why, you're asleep or stupid! About the time before I was married."

"Oh yes!" said Kate, "I remember. I was going to ask, mamma, before you were married, had you many suitors?"

"Suitors, my dear!" cried Mrs. Nickleby with a smile of wonderful complacency. "First and last, Kate, I must have had a dozen at least."

"Mamma!" returned Kate in a tone of remonstrance.

"I had indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby; "not including your poor papa, or a young gentleman who used to go, at that time, to the same dancing school, and who *would* send gold watches and bracelets to our house in gilt-edged paper, (which were always returned,) and who afterwards unfortunately went out to Botany Bay in a cadet ship—a convict ship I mean—and escaped into a bush and killed sheep, (I don't know how they got there,) and was going to be hung, only he accidentally choked himself, and the government pardoned him. Then there was young Lukin," said Mrs. Nickleby, beginning with her left thumb, and checking off the names on her fingers—"Mogley—Tipslark—Cabbery—Smifser——"

Having now reached her little finger, Mrs. Nickleby was carrying the account over to the other hand, when a loud "Hem!" which appeared to come from the very foundation of the garden wall, gave both herself and her daughter a violent start.

"Mamma! what was that?" said Kate in a low tone of voice.

"Upon my word, my dear," returned Mrs. Nickleby, considerably startled, "unless it was the gentleman belonging to the next house, I don't know what it could possibly——"

"A—hem!" cried the same voice; and that not in the tone of an ordinary clearing of the throat, but in a kind of bellow, which woke up all the echoes in the neighbourhood, and was prolonged to an extent which must have made the unseen bellower quite black in the face.

"I understand it now, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, laying her hand on Kate's; "don't be alarmed, my love, it's not directed to you, and is not intended to frighten anybody. Let us give everybody their due, Kate; I am bound to say that."

So saying, Mrs. Nickleby nodded her head, and patted the back of her daughter's hand, a great many times, and looked as if she could tell something vastly important if she chose, but had self-denial, thank Heaven; and wouldn't do it.

"What do you mean, mamma?" demanded Kate in evident surprise.

"Don't be flurried, my dear," replied Mrs. Nickleby, looking towards the garden wall, "for you see *I*'m not, and if it would be excusable in anybody to be flurried, it certainly would—under all the circumstances—be excusable in me, but I am not, Kate—not at all."

"It seems designed to attract our attention, mamma," said Kate.

"It *is* designed to attract our attention, my dear—at least," rejoined Mrs. Nickleby, drawing herself up, and patting her daughter's hand more blandly than before, "to attract the attention of one of us. Hem! you needn't be at all uneasy, my dear."

Kate looked very much perplexed, and was apparently about to ask for further explanation, when a shouting and scuffling noise, as of an elderly gentleman whooping, and kicking up his legs on loose gravel, with great violence, was heard to proceed from the same direction as the former sounds; and, before they had subsided, a large cucumber was seen to shoot up in the air with the velocity of a sky-rocket, whence it descended, tumbling over and over, until it fell at Mrs. Nickleby's feet.

This remarkable appearance was succeeded by another of a precisely similar description; then a fine vegetable marrow, of unusually large dimensions, was seen to whirl aloft, and come toppling down; then, several cucumbers shot up together; and, finally, the air was darkened by a shower of onions, turnip radishes, and other small vegetables, which fell rolling and scattering and bumping about in all directions.

As Kate rose from her seat in some alarm, and caught her mother's hand to run with her into the house, she felt herself rather retarded than assisted in her intention; and, following the direction of Mrs. Nickleby's eyes, was quite terrified by the apparition of an old black velvet cap, which, by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of steps, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage, (which, like their own, was a detached building,) and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face, in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes: very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets, with a dull, languishing, leering look, most ugly to behold.

"Mamma!" cried Kate, really terrified for the moment, "why do you stop, why do you lose an instant?—Mamma, pray come in!"

"Kate, my dear," returned her mother, still holding back, "how can you be so foolish? I'm ashamed of you. How do you suppose you are ever to get through life, if you're such a coward as this? What do you want, sir?" said Mrs. Nickleby, addressing the intruder with a sort of simpering displeasure. "How dare you look into this garden?"

"Queen of my soul," replied the stranger, folding his hands together, "this goblet sip!"

"Nonsense, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Kate, my love, pray be quiet."

"Won't you sip the goblet?" urged the stranger, with his head imploringly on one side, and his right hand on his breast. "Oh, do sip the goblet!"

"I shall not consent to do anything of the kind, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Pray begone."

"Why is it," said the old gentleman, coming up a step higher, and leaning his elbows on the wall, with as much complacency as if he were looking out of window, "why is it that beauty is always obdurate, even when admiration is as honourable and respectful as mine?" Here he smiled, kissed his hand, and made several low bows. "Is it owing to the bees, who, when the honey season is over, and they are supposed to have been killed with brimstone, in reality fly to Barbary and lull the captive Moors to sleep with their drowsy songs? Or is it," he added, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, "in consequence of the statue at Charing Cross having been lately seen, on the Stock Exchange at midnight, walking arm-in-arm with the Pump from Aldgate, in a riding habit?"

"Mamma," murmured Kate, "do you hear him?"

"Hush, my dear!" replied Mrs. Nickleby in the same tone of voice, "he is very polite, and I think that was a quotation from the poets. Pray don't worry me so—you'll pinch my arm black and blue. Go away, sir!"

"Quite away?" said the gentleman with a languishing look. "Oh! quite away?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Nickleby, "certainly. You have no business here. This is private property, sir; you ought to know that."

"I do know," said the old gentleman, laying his finger on his nose, with an air of familiarity most reprehensible, "that this is a sacred and enchanted spot, where the most divine charms"—here he kissed his hand and bowed again—"waft mellifluousness over the neighbours' gardens, and force the fruit and vegetables into

premature existence. That fact I am acquainted with. But will you permit me, fairest creature, to ask you one question, in the absence of the planet Venus, who has gone on business to the Horse Guards, and would otherwise—jealous of your superior charms—interpose between us?"

"Kate," observed Mrs. Nickleby, turning to her daughter, "it's very awkward, positively. I really don't know what to say to this gentleman. One ought to be civil, you know."

"Dear mamma," rejoined Kate, "don't say a word to him, but let us run away as fast as we can, and shut ourselves up till Nicholas comes home."

Mrs. Nickleby looked very grand, not to say contemptuous, at this humiliating proposal; and, turning to the old gentleman, who had watched them during these whispers with absorbing eagerness, said—

"If you will conduct yourself, sir, like the gentleman I should imagine you to be, from your language and—and—appearance, (quite the counterpart of your grandpapa, Kate, my dear, in his best days,) and will put your question to me in plain words, I will answer it."

If Mrs. Nickleby's excellent papa had borne, in his best days, a resemblance to the neighbour now looking over the wall, he must have been, to say the least, a very queer-looking old gentleman in his prime. Perhaps Kate thought so, for she ventured to glance at his living portrait with some attention, as he took off his black velvet cap, and, exhibiting a perfectly bald head, made a long series of bows, each accompanied with a fresh kiss of the hand. After exhausting himself, to all appearance, with this fatiguing performance, he covered his head once more, pulled the cap very carefully over the tips of his ears, and, resuming his former attitude, said:

"The question is——"

Here he broke off to look round in every direction, and satisfy himself beyond all doubt that there were no listeners near. Assured that there were not, he tapped his nose several times, accompanying the action with a cunning look, as though congratulating himself on his caution; and, stretching out his neck, said in a loud whisper:

"Are you a princess?"

"You are mocking me, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby, making a feint of retreating towards the house.

"No, but are you?" said the old gentleman.

"You know I am not, sir," replied Mrs. Nickleby.

"Then are you any relation to the Archbishop of Canterbury?" inquired the old gentleman with great anxiety, "or to the Pope of Rome? or the Speaker of the House of Commons? Forgive me if I am wrong, but I was told you were niece to the Commissioners of Paving, and daughter-in-law to the Lord Mayor and Court of Common Council, which would account for your relationship to all three."

"Whoever has spread such reports, sir," returned Mrs. Nickleby with some warmth, "has taken great liberties with my name, and one which I am sure my son Nicholas, if he was aware of it, would not allow for an instant. The idea!" said Mrs. Nickleby, drawing herself up, "niece to the Commissioners of Paving!"

"Pray, mamma, come away!" whispered Kate.

"'Pray, mamma!' Nonsense, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby angrily; "but that's just the way. If they had said I was niece to a piping bullfinch, what would you care? But I have no sympathy," whimpered Mrs. Nickleby. "I don't expect it, that's one thing."

"Tears!" cried the old gentleman, with such an energetic jump, that he fell down two or three steps, and grated his chin against the wall. "Catch the crystal globules—catch 'em—bottle 'em up—cork 'em tight—put sealing-wax on the top—seal 'em with a Cupid—label 'em 'Best quality'—and stow 'em away in the fourteen bin, with a bar of iron on the top to keep the thunder off!"

Issuing these commands, as if there were a dozen attendants all actively engaged in their execution, he turned his velvet cap inside out, put it on with great dignity so as to obscure his right eye and three-fourths of his nose, and, sticking his arms a-kimbo, looked very fiercely at a sparrow hard by, till the bird flew away, when he put his cap in his pocket with an air of great satisfaction, and addressed himself with respectful demeanour to Mrs. Nickleby.

"Beautiful madam," such were his words, "if I have made any mistake with regard to your family or connections, I humbly beseech you to pardon me. If I supposed you to be related to Foreign Powers or Native Boards, it is because you have a manner, a carriage, a dignity, which you will excuse my saying that none but yourself (with the single exception, perhaps, of the tragic muse, when playing extemporaneously on the barrel-organ before the East India Company) can parallel. I am not a youth, ma'am, as you see; and, although beings like you can never grow old, I venture to presume that we are fitted for each other."

"Really, Kate, my love!" said Mrs. Nickleby faintly, and looking another way.

"I have estates, ma'am," said the old gentle-

man, flourishing his right hand negligently, as if he made very light of such matters, and speaking very fast; "jewels, lighthouses, fish-ponds, a whalery of my own in the North Sea, and several oyster beds of great profit in the Pacific Ocean. If you will have the kindness to step down to the Royal Exchange, and to take the cocked-hat off the stoutest beadle's head, you will find my card in the lining of the crown, wrapped up in a piece of blue paper. My walking-stick is also to be seen on application to the chaplain of the House of Commons, who is strictly forbidden to take any money for showing it. I have enemies about me, ma'am," he looked towards his house and spoke very low, "who attack me on all occasions, and wish to secure my property. If you bless me with your hand and heart, you can apply to the Lord Chancellor or call out the military if necessary—sending my toothpick to the commander-in-chief will be sufficient—and so clear the house of them before the ceremony is performed. After that, love bliss and rapture; rapture love and bliss. Be mine, be mine!"

Repeating these last words with great rapture and enthusiasm, the old gentleman put on his black velvet cap again, and, looking up into the sky in a hasty manner, said something that was not quite intelligible concerning a balloon he expected, and which was rather after its time.

"Be mine, be mine!" repeated the old gentleman.

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I have hardly the power to speak; but it is necessary for the happiness of all parties that this matter should be set at rest for ever."

"Surely there is no necessity for you to say one word, mamma?" reasoned Kate.

"You will allow me, my dear, if you please, to judge for myself," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"Be mine, be mine!" cried the old gentleman.

"It can scarcely be expected, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby, fixing her eyes modestly on the ground, "that I should tell a stranger whether I feel flattered and obliged by such proposals, or not. They certainly are made under very singular circumstances; still, at the same time, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent, of course," (Mrs. Nickleby's customary qualification,) "they must be gratifying and agreeable to one's feelings."

"Be mine, be mine!" cried the old gentleman. "Gog and Magog, Gog and Magog! Be mine, be mine!"

"It will be sufficient for me to say, sir," resumed Mrs. Nickleby with perfect seriousness —"and I'm sure you'll see the propriety of taking an answer and going away—that I have made up my mind to remain a widow, and to devote myself to my children. You may not suppose I am the mother of two children—indeed, many people have doubted it, and said that nothing on earth could ever make 'em believe it possible—but it is the case, and they are both grown up. We shall be very glad to have you for a neighbour—very glad; delighted, I'm sure—but in any other character it's quite impossible, quite. As to my being young enough to marry again, that, perhaps, may be so, or it may not be; but I couldn't think of it for an instant, not on any account whatever. I said I never would, and I never will. It's a very painful thing to have to reject proposals, and I would much rather that none were made; at the same time, this is the answer that I determined long ago to make, and this is the answer I shall always give."

These observations were partly addressed to the old gentleman, partly to Kate, and partly delivered in soliloquy. Towards their conclusion, the suitor evinced a very irreverent degree of inattention, and Mrs. Nickleby had scarcely finished speaking, when, to the great terror both of that lady and her daughter, he suddenly flung off his coat, and, springing on the top of the wall, threw himself into an attitude which displayed his small-clothes and grey worsteds to the fullest advantage, and concluded by standing on one leg, and repeating his favourite bellow with increased vehemence.

While he was still dwelling on the last note, and embellishing it with a prolonged flourish, a dirty hand was observed to glide stealthily and swiftly along the top of the wall, as if in pursuit of a fly, and then to clasp with the utmost dexterity one of the old gentleman's ankles. This done, the companion hand appeared, and clasped the other ankle.

Thus encumbered, the old gentleman lifted his legs awkwardly once or twice, as if they were very clumsy and imperfect pieces of machinery, and then, looking down on his own side of the wall, burst into a loud laugh.

"It's you, is it?" said the old gentleman.

"Yes, it's me," replied a gruff voice.

"How's the Emperor of Tartary?" said the old gentleman.

"Oh! he's much the same as usual," was the reply. "No better and no worse."

"The young Prince of China," said the old gentleman with much interest. "Is he reconciled to his father-in-law, the great potato salesman?"

"No," answered the gruff voice; "and he says he never will be, that's more."

"If that's the case," observed the old gentleman, "perhaps I'd better come down."

"Well," said the man on the other side, "I think you had, perhaps."

One of the hands being then cautiously unclasped, the old gentleman dropped into a sitting posture, and was looking round to smile and bow to Mrs. Nickleby, when he disappeared with some precipitation, as if his legs had been pulled from below.

Very much relieved by his disappearance, Kate was turning to speak to her mamma, when

"CONCLUDED BY STANDING ON ONE LEG, AND REPEATING HIS FAVOURITE BELLOW WITH INCREASED VEHEMENCE."

the dirty hands again became visible, and were immediately followed by the figure of a coarse squat man, who ascended by the steps which had been recently occupied by their singular neighbour.

"Beg your pardon, ladies," said this newcomer, grinning and touching his hat. "Has he been making love to either of you?"

"Yes," said Kate.

"Ah!" rejoined the man, taking his handker-

chief out of his hat and wiping his face, "he always will, you know. Nothing will prevent his making love."

"I need not ask you if he is out of his mind, poor creature," said Kate.

"Why, no," replied the man, looking into his hat, throwing his handkerchief in at one dab, and putting it on again. "That's pretty plain, that is."

"Has he been long so?" asked Kate.

"A long while."

"And is there no hope for him?" said Kate compassionately.

"Not a bit, and don't deserve to be," replied the keeper. "He's a deal pleasanter without his senses than with 'em. He was the cruellest, wickedest, out-and-outerest old flint that ever drawed breath."

"Indeed!" said Kate.

"By George!" replied the keeper, shaking his head so emphatically that he was obliged to frown to keep his hat on. "I never come across such a vagabond, and my mate says the same. Broke his poor wife's heart, turned his daughters out of doors, drove his sons into the streets—it was a blessing he went mad at last, through evil tempers, and covetousness, and selfishness, and guzzling, and drinking, or he'd have drove many others so. Hope for *him*, an old rip! There isn't too much hope going, but I'll bet a crown that what there is, is saved for more deserving chaps than him, anyhow."

With which confession of his faith, the keeper shook his head again, as much as to say that nothing short of this would do, if things were to go on at all; and touching his hat sulkily—not that he was in an ill-humour, but that his subject ruffled him—descended the ladder, and took it away.

During this conversation Mrs. Nickleby had regarded the man with a severe and steadfast look. She now heaved a profound sigh, and, pursing up her lips, shook her head in a slow and doubtful manner.

"Poor creature!" said Kate.

"Ah! poor indeed!" rejoined Mrs. Nickleby. "It's shameful that such things should be allowed—shameful!"

"How can they be helped, mamma?" said Kate mournfully. "The infirmities of nature——"

"Nature!" said Mrs. Nickleby. "What! Do *you* suppose this poor gentleman is out of his mind?"

"Can anybody who sees him entertain any other opinion, mamma?"

"Why, then, I just tell you this, Kate," returned Mrs. Nickleby, "that he is nothing of the kind, and I am surprised you can be so imposed upon. It's some plot of these people to possess themselves of his property—didn't he say so himself? He may be a little odd and flighty, perhaps; many of us are that; but downright mad! and express himself as he does, respectfully, and in quite poetical language, and making offers with so much thought, and care, and prudence—not as if he ran into the streets, and went down upon his knees to the first chit of a girl he met, as a madman would! No, no, Kate, there's a great deal too much method in *his* madness; depend upon that, my dear."

CHAPTER XLII.

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE CONVIVIAL SENTIMENT, THAT THE BEST OF FRIENDS MUST SOMETIMES PART.

THE pavement of Snow Hill had been baking and frying all day in the heat, and the twain Saracens' heads guarding the entrance to the hostelry of whose name and sign they are the duplicate presentments, looked—or seemed, in the eyes of jaded and foot-sore passers-by, to look—more vicious than usual, after blistering and scorching in the sun, when, in one of the inn's smallest sitting-rooms, through whose open window there rose, in a palpable steam, wholesome exhalations from reeking coach horses, the usual furniture of a tea-table was displayed in neat and inviting order, flanked by large joints of roast and boiled, a tongue, a pigeon-pie, a cold fowl, a tankard of ale, and other little matters of the like kind, which, in degenerate towns and cities, are generally understood to belong more particularly to solid lunches, stage-coach dinners, or unusually substantial breakfasts.

Mr. John Browdie, with his hands in his pockets, hovered restlessly about these delicacies, stopping occasionally to whisk the flies out of the sugar-basin with his wife's pocket-handkerchief, or to dip a tea-spoon in the milk-pot and carry it to his mouth, or to cut off a little knob of crust, and a little corner of meat, and swallow them at two gulps like a couple of pills. After every one of these flirtations with the eatables, he pulled out his watch, and declared, with an earnestness quite pathetic, that he couldn't undertake to hold out two minutes longer.

"Tilly!" said John to his lady, who was reclining, half awake and half asleep, upon a sofa.

"Well, John!"

"Weel, John!" retorted her husband impatiently. "Dost thou feel hoongry, lass?"

"Not very," said Mrs. Browdie.

"Not vary!" repeated John, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "Hear her say not vary, and us dining at three, and loonching off pasthry thot aggravates a mon 'stead of pacifying him! Not vary!"

"Here's a gen'l'man for you, sir," said the waiter, looking in.

"A wa'at for me?" cried John, as though he thought it must be a letter, or a parcel.

"A gen'l'man, sir."

"Stars and garthers, chap!" said John, "wa'at dost thou coom and say thot for? In wi' 'un!"

"Are you at home, sir?"

"At whoam!" cried John. "I wish I wur; I'd ha tea'd two hour ago. Why, I told t'oother chap to look sharp ootside door, and tell 'un, d'rectly he coom, thot we war faint wi' hoonger. In wi' 'un! Aha! Thee hond, Misther Nickleby. This is nigh to be the proodest day o' my life, sir. Hoo be all wi' ye? Ding! But I'm glod o' this!"

Quite forgetting even his hunger in the heartiness of his salutation, John Browdie shook Nicholas by the hand again and again, slapping his palm with great violence between each shake, to add warmth to the reception.

"Ah! there she be," said John, observing the look which Nicholas directed towards his wife. "There she be—we shan't quarrel about her noo—eh? Ecod, when I think o' thot—— But thou want'st soom'at to eat. Fall to, mun, fall to, and for wa'at we're aboot to receive——"

No doubt the grace was properly finished, but nothing more was heard, for John had already begun to play such a knife and fork, that his speech was, for the time, gone.

"I shall take the usual licence, Mr. Browdie," said Nicholas as he placed a chair for the bride.

"Tak' whatever thou like'st," said John, "and, when a's gane, ca' for more."

Without stopping to explain, Nicholas kissed the blushing Mrs. Browdie, and handed her to her seat.

"I say," said John, rather astounded for the moment, "mak' theeself quite at whoam, will 'ee?"

"You may depend upon that," replied Nicholas; "on one condition."

"And wa'at may thot be?" asked John.

"That you make me a godfather the very first time you have occasion for one."

"Eh! d'ye hear thot?" cried John, laying down his knife and fork. "A godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha! Tilly—hear till 'un—a godfeyther! Divn't say a word more, ye'll never beat thot. Occasion for 'un—a godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha!"

Never was man so tickled with a respectable old joke as John Browdie was with this. He chuckled, roared, half suffocated himself by laughing large pieces of beef into his windpipe, roared again, persisted in eating at the same time, got red in the face and black in the forehead, coughed, cried, got better, went off again laughing inwardly, got worse, choked, had his back thumped, stamped about, frightened his wife, and at last recovered in a state of the last exhaustion, and with the water streaming from his eyes, but still faintly ejaculating, "A godfeyther—a godfeyther, Tilly!" in a tone bespeaking an exquisite relish of the sally, which no suffering could diminish.

"You remember the night of our first tea-drinking?" said Nicholas.

"Shall I e'er forget it, mun?" replied John Browdie.

"He was a desperate fellow that night, though, was he not, Mrs. Browdie?" said Nicholas. "Quite a monster!"

"If you had only heard him as we were going home, Mr. Nickleby, you'd have said so indeed," returned the bride. "I never was so frightened in all my life."

"Coom, coom," said John with a broad grin; "thou know'st betther than thot, Tilly."

"So I was," replied Mrs. Browdie. "I almost made up my mind never to speak to you again."

"A'most!" said John with a broader grin than the last. "A'most made up her mind! And she wur coaxin' and coaxin', and wheedlin' and wheedlin', a' the blessed wa'. 'Wa'at didst thou let yon chap mak' oop tiv 'ee for?' says I. 'I deedn't, John,' says she, a squeedgin' my arm. 'You deedn't?' says I. 'Noa,' says she, a squeedgin' of me agean."

"Lor, John!" interposed his pretty wife, colouring very much. "How can you talk such nonsense? As if I should have dreamt of such a thing!"

"I dinnot know whether thou'd ever dreamt of it, though I think that's loike eneaf, mind," retorted John; "but thou didst it. 'Ye're a feeckle, changeable weather-cock, lass," says I. 'Not feeckle, John,' says she. 'Yes,' says I, 'feeckle, dom'd feeckle. Dinnot tell me thou bean't, efther yon chap at schoolmeasther's,' says I. 'Him!' says she, quite screeching. 'Ah! him!' says I. 'Why, John,' says she—and she coom a deal closer and squeedged a deal harder than she'd deane afore—'dost thou

think it's nat'ral, noo, that having such a proper mun as thou to keep company wi', I'd ever tak' oop wi' such a leetle, scanty, whipper-snapper as yon?' she says. Ha! ha! ha! She said whipper-snapper! 'Ecod!' I says, 'efther thot, neame the day, and let's have it ower!' Ha! ha! ha!"

Nicholas laughed very heartily at this story, both on account of its telling against himself, and his being desirous to spare the blushes of Mrs. Browdie, whose protestations were drowned in peals of laughter from her husband. His good-nature soon put her at her ease; and, although she still denied the charge, she laughed so heartily at it, that Nicholas had the satisfaction of feeling assured that in all essential respects it was strictly true.

"This is the second time," said Nicholas, "that we have ever taken a meal together, and only the third I have ever seen you; and yet it really seems to me as if I were among old friends."

"Weel!" observed the Yorkshireman, "so I say."

"And I am sure I do," added his young wife.

"I have the best reason to be impressed with the feeling, mind," said Nicholas; "for if it had not been for your kindness of heart, my good friend, when I had no right or reason to expect it, I know not what might have become of me, or what plight I should have been in by this time."

"Talk aboot soom'at else," replied John gruffly, "and dinnot bother."

"It must be a new song to the same tune, then," said Nicholas, smiling. "I told you in my letter that I deeply felt and admired your sympathy with that poor lad, whom you released at the risk of involving yourself in trouble and difficulty; but I can never tell you how grateful he and I, and others whom you don't know, are to you for taking pity on him."

"Ecod!" rejoined John Browdie, drawing up his chair; "and I can never tell *you* hoo gratful soom folks that we do know would be loikewise, if *they* knowed I had takken pity on him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Browdie, "what a state I was in that night!"

"Were they at all disposed to give you credit for assisting in the escape?" inquired Nicholas of John Browdie.

"Not a bit," replied the Yorkshireman, extending his mouth from ear to ear. "There I lay, snoog in schoolmeasther's bed long efther it was dark, and nobody coom nigh the pleace. 'Weel!' thinks I, 'he's got a pretty good start, and if he bean't whoam by noo, he never will be; so you may coom as quick as you loike, and foind us reddy'—that is, you know, schoolmeasther might coom."

"I understand," said Nicholas.

"Presently," resumed John, "he *did* coom. I heerd door shut doon-stairs, and him a warking oop in the daark. 'Slow and steddy,' I says to myself; 'tak' your time, sir—no hurry.' He cooms to the door, turns the key—turns the key when there warn't nothing to hoold the lock—and ca's oot 'Hallo, there!'—'Yes,' thinks I, 'you may do thot agean, and not wakken anybody, sir.' 'Hallo, there!' he says, and then he stops. 'Thou'd betther not aggravate me,' says schoolmeasther efther a little time. 'I'll brak' every boan in your boddy, Smike,' he says efther another little time. Then, all of a soodden, he sings oot for a loight, and when it cooms—ecod, such a hoorly-boorly! 'Wa'at's the matter?' says I. 'He's gane,' says he,—stark mad wi' vengeance. 'Have you heerd nought?' 'Ees,' says I, 'I heerd street-door shut, no time at a' ago. I heerd a person run doon there' (pointing t'other wa'—eh?) 'Help!' he cries. 'I'll help you,' says I; and off we set—the wrong wa'! Ho! ho! ho!"

"Did you go far?" asked Nicholas.

"Far!" replied John; "I run him clean off his legs in quarther of an hoor. To see old schoolmeasther, wi'out his hat, skimming along oop to his knees in mud and wather, tumbling over fences, and rowling into ditches, and bawling oot like mad, wi' his one eye looking sharp out for the lad, and his coat-tails flying out behind, and him spattered wi' mud all ower, face and all! I tho't I should ha' dropped doon, and killed myself wi' laughing."

John laughed so heartily at the mere recollection, that he communicated the contagion to both his hearers, and all three burst into peals of laughter, which were renewed again and again, until they could laugh no longer.

"He's a bad 'un," said John, wiping his eyes; "a very bad 'un, is schoolmeasther."

"I can't bear the sight of him, John," said his wife.

"Coom," retorted John, "that's tidy in you, thot is. If it wa'nt along o' you, we shouldn't know nought aboot 'un. Thou knowed 'un first, Tilly, didn't thou?"

"I couldn't help knowing Fanny Squeers, John," returned his wife; "she was an old playmate of mine, you know."

"Weel," replied John, "dean't I say so, lass? It's best to be neighbourly, and keep up old acquaintance loike; and what I say is, dean't quarrel if 'ee can help it. Dinnot think so, Mr. Nickleby?"

"Certainly," returned Nicholas; "and you acted upon that principle when I met you on horseback on the road, after our memorable evening."

"Sure-ly," said John. "Wa'at I say I stick by."

"And that's a fine thing to do, and manly too," said Nicholas, "though it's not exactly what we understand by 'coming Yorkshire over us' in London. Miss Squeers is stopping with you, you said in your note."

"Yes," replied John, "Tilly's bridesmaid; and a queer bridesmaid she be, too. She wean't be a bride in a hurry, I reckon."

"For shame, John!" said Mrs. Browdie; with an acute perception of the joke, though, being a bride herself.

"The groom will be a blessed mun," said John, his eyes twinkling at the idea. "He'll be in luck, he will."

"You see, Mr. Nickleby," said his wife, "that it was in consequence of her being here that John wrote to you and fixed to-night, because we thought that it wouldn't be pleasant for you to meet after what has passed——"

"Unquestionably. You were quite right in that," said Nicholas, interrupting.

"Especially," observed Mrs. Browdie, looking very sly, "after what we know about past and gone love matters."

"We know, indeed!" said Nicholas, shaking his head. "You behaved rather wickedly there, I suspect."

"O' course she did," said John Browdie, passing his huge forefinger through one of his wife's pretty ringlets, and looking very proud of her. "She wur always as skittish and full o' tricks as a——"

"Well, as a what?" said his wife.

"As a woman," returned John. "Ding! But I dinnot know ought else that cooms near it."

"You were speaking about Miss Squeers," said Nicholas, with the view of stopping some slight connubialities which had begun to pass between Mr. and Mrs. Browdie, and which rendered the position of a third party in some degree embarrassing, as occasioning him to feel rather in the way than otherwise.

"Oh yes!" rejoined Mrs. Browdie. "John, ha' done. —John fixed to-night, because she had settled that she would go and drink tea with her father. And to make quite sure of there being nothing amiss, and of your being quite alone with us, he settled to go out there and fetch her home."

"That was a very good arrangement," said Nicholas, "though I am sorry to be the occasion of so much trouble."

"Not the least in the world," returned Mrs. Browdie; "for we have looked forward to see you—John and I have—with the greatest possible pleasure. Do you know, Mr. Nickleby," said Mrs. Browdie with her archest smile, "that I really think Fanny Squeers was very fond of you?"

"I am very much obliged to her," said Nicholas; "but, upon my word, I never aspired to making any impression upon her virgin heart."

"How you talk!" tittered Mrs. Browdie. "No, but do you know that really—seriously, now, and without any joking—I was given to understand, by Fanny herself, that you had made an offer to her, and that you two were going to be engaged quite solemn and regular."

"Was you, ma'am—was you!" cried a shrill female voice; "was you given to understand that I—I—was going to be engaged to an assassinating thief that shed the gore of my pa? Do you—do you think, ma'am—that I was very fond of such dirt beneath my feet, as I couldn't condescend to touch with kitchen tongs, without blacking and crocking myself by the contract? Do you, ma'am—do you? Oh! base and degrading 'Tilda!"

With these reproaches Miss Squeers flung the door wide open, and disclosed to the eyes of the astonished Browdies and Nicholas, not only her own symmetrical form, arrayed in the chaste white garments before described (a little dirtier), but the form of her brother and father, the pair of Wackfords.

"This is the hend, is it?" continued Miss Squeers, who, being excited, aspirated her h's strongly: "this is the hend, is it, of all my forbearance and friendship for that double-faced thing—that viper, that—that—mermaid?" (Miss Squeers hesitated a long time for this last epithet, and brought it out triumphantly at last, as if it quite clinched the business.) "This is the hend, is it, of all my bearing with her deceitfulness, her lowness, her falseness, her laying herself out to catch the admiration of vulgar minds, in a way which made me blush for my—for my——"

"Gender," suggested Mr. Squeers, regarding the spectators with a malevolent eye—literally *a* malevolent eye.

"Yes," said Miss Squeers; "but I thank my stars that my ma is of the same——"

"Hear, hear!" remarked Mr. Squeers; "and I wish she was here to have a scratch at this company."

"This is the hend, is it," said Miss Squeers,

tossing her head, and looking contemptuously at the floor, "of my taking notice of that rubbishing creature, and demeaning myself to patronise her?"

"Oh, come," rejoined Mrs. Browdie, disregarding all the endeavours of her spouse to restrain her, and forcing herself into a front row, "don't talk such nonsense as that!"

"Have I not patronised you, ma'am?" demanded Miss Squeers.

"No," returned Mrs. Browdie.

"I will not look for blushes in such a quarter," said Miss Squeers haughtily, "for that countenance is a stranger to everything but hignominiousness and red-faced boldness."

"I say," interposed John Browdie, nettled by these accumulated attacks on his wife, "dra' it mild, dra' it mild."

"You, Mr. Browdie," said Miss Squeers, taking him up very quickly, "I pity. I have no

"I SAY," SAID JOHN, RATHER ASTOUNDED FOR THE MOMENT, "MAK' THEESELF QUITE AT WHOAM, WILL 'EE?"

feeling for you, sir, but one of unliquidated pity."

"Oh!" said John.

"No," said Miss Squeers, looking sideways at her parent, "although I *am* a queer bridesmaid, and *shan't* be a bride in a hurry, and although my husband *will* be in luck, I entertain no sentiments towards you, sir, but sentiments of pity."

Here Miss Squeers looked sideways at her father again, who looked sideways at her, as much as to say, "There you had him."

"*I* know what you've got to go through," said Miss Squeers, shaking her curls violently. "*I* know what life is before you, and, if you was my bitterest and deadliest enemy, I could wish you nothing worse."

"Couldn't you wish to be married to him yourself, if that was the case?" inquired Mrs. Browdie with great suavity of manner.

"Oh, ma'am, how witty you are!" retorted Miss Squeers with a low curtsy; "almost as witty, ma'am, as you are clever. How very

clever it was in you, ma'am, to choose a time when I had gone to tea with my pa, and was sure not to come back without being fetched! What a pity you never thought that other people might be as clever as yourself, and spoil your plans!"

"You won't vex me, child, with such airs as these," said the late Miss Price, assuming the matron.

"Don't *Missis* me, ma'am, if you please," returned Miss Squeers sharply. "I'll not bear it. Is *this* the hend——"

"Dang it a'," cried John Browdie impatiently. "Say thee say out, Fanny, and mak' sure it's the end, and dinnot ask nobody whether it is or not."

"Thanking you for your advice, which was not required, Mr. Browdie," returned Miss Squeers with laborious politeness, "have the goodness not to presume to meddle with my Christian name. Even my pity shall never make me forget what's due to myself, Mr. Browdie. 'Tilda," said Miss Squeers with such a sudden accession of violence that John started in his boots, "I throw you off for ever, miss. I abandon you. I renounce you. I wouldn't," cried Miss Squeers in a solemn voice, "have a child named 'Tilda—not to save it from its grave."

"As for the matther o' that," observed John, "it'll be time eneaf to think aboot neaming of it when it cooms."

"John!" interposed his wife, "don't tease her."

"Oh! Tease, indeed!" cried Miss Squeers, bridling up. "Tease, indeed! He, he! Tease, too! No, don't tease her. Consider her feelings, pray!"

"If it's fated that listeners are never to hear any good of themselves," said Mrs. Browdie, "I can't help it, and I am very sorry for it. But I will say, Fanny, that times out of number I have spoken so kindly of you behind your back, that even you could have found no fault with what I said."

"Oh, I dare say not, ma'am!" cried Miss Squeers with another curtsy. "Best thanks to you for your goodness, and begging and praying you not to be hard upon me another time!"

"I don't know," resumed Mrs. Browdie, "that I have said anything very bad of you, even now—at all events, what I did say was quite true; but, if I have, I am very sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. You have said much worse of me, scores of times, Fanny; but I have never borne any malice to you, and I hope you'll not bear any to me."

Miss Squeers made no more direct reply than surveying her former friend from top to toe, and elevating her nose in the air with ineffable disdain. But some indistinct allusions to a "puss," and a "minx," and a "contemptible creature," escaped her; and this, together with a severe biting of the lips, great difficulty in swallowing, and very frequent comings and goings of breath, seemed to imply that feelings were swelling in Miss Squeers's bosom too great for utterance.

While the foregoing conversation was proceeding, Master Wackford, finding himself unnoticed, and feeling his preponderating inclinations strong upon him, had by little and little sidled up to the table, and attacked the food with such slight skirmishing as drawing his fingers round and round the inside of the plates, and afterwards sucking them with infinite relish—picking the bread, and dragging the pieces over the surface of the butter—pocketing lumps of sugar, pretending all the time to be absorbed in thought—and so forth. Finding that no interference was attempted with these small liberties, he gradually mounted to greater, and, after helping himself to a moderately good cold collation, was, by this time, deep in the pie.

Nothing of this had been unobserved by Mr. Squeers, who, so long as the attention of the company was fixed upon other objects, hugged himself to think that his son and heir should be fattening at the enemy's expense. But there being now an appearance of a temporary calm, in which the proceedings of little Wackford could scarcely fail to be observed, he feigned to be aware of the circumstance for the first time, and inflicted upon the face of that young gentleman a slap that made the very teacups ring.

"Eating!" cried Mr. Squeers, "of what his father's enemies has left! It's fit to go and poison you, you unnat'ral boy."

"It wean't hurt him," said John, apparently very much relieved by the prospect of having a man in the quarrel; "let 'un eat. I wish the whole school was here. I'd give 'em soom'at to stay their unfort'nate stomachs wi', if I spent the last penny I had!"

Squeers scowled at him with the worst and most malicious expression of which his face was capable—it was a face of remarkable capability, too, in that way—and shook his fist stealthily.

"Coom, coom, schoolmeasther," said John, "dinnot make a fool o' thyself; for if I was to sheake mine—only once—thou'd fa' doon wi' the wind o' it."

"It was you, was it," returned Squeers, "that helped off my runaway boy? It was you, was it?"

"Me!" returned John in a loud tone. "Yes,

it wa' me, coom; wa'at o' that? It wa' me. Noo then!"

"You hear him say he did it, my child!" said Squeers, appealing to his daughter. "You hear him say he did it!"

"Did it!" cried John. "I'll tell 'ee more; hear this, too. If thou'd got another roonaway boy, I'd do it agean. If thou'd got twonty roonaway boys, I'd do it twonty times ower, and twonty more to thot; and I tell thee more," said John, "noo my blood is oop, that thou'rt an old ra'ascal; and that it's weel for thou thou be'est an old 'un, or I'd ha poonded thee to flour, when thou told an honest mun hoo thou'd licked that poor chap in t' coorch."

"An honest man!" cried Squeers with a sneer.

"Ah! an honest man," replied John; "honest in ought but ever putting legs under seame table wi' such as thou."

"Scandal!" said Squeers exultingly. "Two witnesses to it; Wackford knows the nature of an oath, he does—we shall have you there, sir. Rascal, eh?" Mr. Squeers took out his pocket-book, and made a note of it. "Very good. I should say that was worth full twenty pound at the next assizes, without the honesty, sir."

"'Soizes!" cried John; "thou'd betther not talk to me o' 'Soizes. Yorkshire schools have been shown up at 'Soizes afore noo, mun, and it's a ticklish soobjact to revive, I can tell ye."

Mr. Squeers shook his head in a threatening manner, looking very white with passion; and taking his daughter's arm, and dragging little Wackford by the hand, retreated towards the door.

"As for you," said Squeers, turning round and addressing Nicholas, who, as he had caused him to smart pretty soundly on a former occasion, purposely abstained from taking any part in the discussion, "see if I ain't down upon you before long. You'll go a kidnapping of boys, will you? Take care their fathers don't turn up—mark that—take care their fathers don't turn up, and send 'em back to me to do as I like with, in spite of you."

"I am not afraid of that," replied Nicholas, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, and turning away.

"Ain't you?" retorted Squeers with a diabolical look. "Now, then, come along."

"I leave such society, with my pa, for *h*ever," said Miss Squeers, looking contemptuously and loftily round. "I am defiled by breathing the air with such creatures. Poor Mr. Browdie! He! he! he! I do pity him, that I do; he's so deluded. He! he! he!—— Artful and designing 'Tilda!"

With this sudden relapse into the sternest and most majestic wrath, Miss Squeers swept from the room; and, having sustained her dignity until the last possible moment, was heard to sob and scream and struggle in the passage.

John Browdie remained standing behind the table, looking from his wife to Nicholas, and back again, with his mouth wide open, until his hand accidentally fell upon the tankard of ale, when he took it up, and, having obscured his features therewith for some time, drew a long breath, handed it over to Nicholas, and rang the bell.

"Here, waither," said John briskly. "Look alive here. Tak' these things awa', and let's have soom'at broiled for sooper—vary comfortable, and plenty o' it—at ten o'clock. Bring soom brandy and soom wather, and a pair o' slippers—the largest pair in the house—and be quick aboot it. Dash ma' wig!" said John, rubbing his hands, "there's no ganging oot toneeght, noo, to fetch anybody whoam, and ecod, we'll begin to spend the evening in airnest."

CHAPTER XLIII.

OFFICIATES AS A KIND OF GENTLEMAN USHER, IN BRINGING VARIOUS PEOPLE TOGETHER.

THE storm had long given place to a calm the most profound, and the evening was pretty far advanced—indeed, supper was over, and the process of digestion proceeding as favourably as, under the influence of complete tranquillity, cheerful conversation, and a moderate allowance of brandy-and-water, most wise men conversant with the anatomy and functions of the human frame will consider that it ought to have proceeded, when the three friends, or as one might say, both in a civil and religious sense, and with proper deference and regard to the holy state of matrimony, the two friends, (Mr. and Mrs. Browdie counting as no more than one,) were startled by the noise of loud and angry threatenings below-stairs, which presently attained so high a pitch, and were conveyed, besides, in language so towering, sanguinary, and ferocious, that it could hardly have been surpassed, if there had actually been a Saracen's head then present in the establishment, supported on the shoulders and surmounting the trunk of a real, live, furious, and most unappeasable Saracen.

This turmoil, instead of quickly subsiding, after the first outburst, (as turmoils not unfrequently do, whether in taverns, legislative assemblies, or elsewhere,) into a mere grumbling and growling squabble, increased every moment; and, although the whole din appeared to be raised by but one pair of lungs, yet that one pair was of so powerful a quality, and repeated such words as "scoundrel," "rascal," "insolent puppy," and a variety of expletives no less flattering to the party addressed, with such great relish and strength of tone, that a dozen voices raised in concert, under any ordinary circumstances, would have made far less uproar, and created much smaller consternation.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Nicholas, moving hastily towards the door.

John Browdie was striding in the same direction when Mrs. Browdie turned pale, and, leaning back in her chair, requested him with a faint voice to take notice that if he ran into any danger it was her intention to fall into hysterics immediately, and that the consequences might be more serious than he thought for. John looked rather disconcerted by this intelligence, though there was a lurking grin on his face at the same time; but, being quite unable to keep out of the fray, he compromised the matter by tucking his wife's arm under his own, and, thus accompanied, following Nicholas down-stairs with all speed.

The passage outside the coffee-room door was the scene of disturbance, and here were congregated the coffee-room customers and waiters, together with two or three coachmen and helpers from the yard. These had hastily assembled round a young man who, from his appearance, might have been a year or two older than Nicholas, and who, besides having given utterance to the defiances just now described, seemed to have proceeded to even greater lengths in his indignation, inasmuch as his feet had no other covering than a pair of stockings, while a couple of slippers lay at no great distance from the head of a prostrate figure in an opposite corner, who bore the appearance of having been shot into his present retreat by means of a kick, and complimented by having the slippers flung about his ears afterwards.

The coffee-room customers, and the waiters, and the coachmen, and the helpers—not to mention a barmaid who was looking on from behind an open sash-window—seemed at that moment, if a spectator might judge from their winks, nods, and muttered exclamations, strongly disposed to take part against the young gentleman in the stockings. Observing this, and that the young gentleman was nearly of his own age, and had in nothing the appearance of an habitual brawler, Nicholas, impelled by such feelings as will influence young men sometimes, felt a very strong disposition to side with the weaker party, and so thrust himself at once into the centre of the group, and in a more emphatic tone, perhaps, than circumstances might seem to warrant, demanded what all that noise was about.

"Hallo!" said one of the men from the yard, "this is somebody in disguise, this is."

"Room for the eldest son of the Emperor of Roosher, gen'l'men!" cried another fellow.

Disregarding these sallies, which were uncommonly well received, as sallies at the expense of the best-dressed persons in a crowd usually are, Nicholas glanced carelessly round, and addressing the young gentleman, who had by this time picked up his slippers and thrust his feet into them, repeated his inquiries with a courteous air.

"A mere nothing!" he replied.

At this a murmur was raised by the lookers-on, and some of the boldest cried, "Oh, indeed!—Wasn't it, though?—Nothing, eh?—He called that nothing, did he? Lucky for him if he found it nothing." These and many other expressions of ironical disapprobation having been exhausted, two or three of the out-of-door fellows began to hustle Nicholas and the young gentleman who had made the noise: stumbling against them by accident, and treading on their toes, and so forth. But this being a round game, and one not necessarily limited to three or four players, was open to John Browdie too, who, bursting into the little crowd—to the great terror of his wife—and falling about in all directions, now to the right, now to the left, now forwards, now backwards, and accidentally driving his elbow through the hat of the tallest helper, who had been particularly active, speedily caused the odds to wear a very different appearance; while more than one stout fellow limped away to a respectful distance, anathematizing with tears in his eyes the heavy tread and ponderous feet of the burly Yorkshireman.

"Let me see him do it again," said he who had been kicked into the corner, rising as he spoke, apparently more from the fear of John Browdie's inadvertently treading upon him than from any desire to place himself on equal terms with his late adversary. "Let me see him do it again. That's all."

"Let me hear you make those remarks again," said the young man, "and I'll knock that head of yours in among the wine-glasses behind you there."

Here a waiter who had been rubbing his

hands in excessive enjoyment of the scene, so long as only the breaking of heads was in question, adjured the spectators with great earnestness to fetch the police, declaring that otherwise murder would be surely done, and that he was responsible for all the glass and china on the premises.

"No one need trouble himself to stir," said the young gentleman; "I am going to remain in the house all night, and shall be found here in the morning if there is any assault to answer for."

"What did you strike him for?" asked one of the bystanders.

"Ah! what did you strike him for?" demanded the others.

The unpopular gentleman looked coolly round, and, addressing himself to Nicholas, said:—

"You inquired just now what was the matter here. The matter is simply this. Yonder person, who was drinking with a friend in the coffee-room when I took my seat there for half an hour before going to bed, (for I have just come off a journey, and preferred stopping here to-night, to going home at this hour, where I was not expected until to-morrow,) chose to express himself in very disrespectful and insolently familiar terms of a young lady, whom I recognised from his description and other circumstances, and whom I have the honour to know. As he spoke loud enough to be overheard by the other guests who were present, I informed him most civilly that he was mistaken in his conjectures, which were of an offensive nature, and requested him to forbear. He did so for a little time, but, as he chose to renew his conversation, when leaving the room, in a more offensive strain than before, I could not refrain from making after him, and facilitating his departure by a kick, which reduced him to the posture in which you saw him just now. I am the best judge of my own affairs, I take it," said the young man, who had certainly not quite recovered from his recent heat; "if anybody here thinks proper to make this quarrel his own, I have not the smallest earthly objection, I do assure him."

Of all possible courses of proceeding under the circumstances detailed, there was certainly not one which, in his then state of mind, could have appeared more laudable to Nicholas than this. There were not many subjects of dispute which at that moment could have come home to his own breast more powerfully, for, having the unknown uppermost in his thoughts, it naturally occurred to him that he would have done just the same if any audacious gossiper durst have presumed in his hearing to speak lightly of her. Influenced by these considerations, he espoused the young gentleman's quarrel with great warmth, protesting that he had done quite right, and that he respected him for it; which John Browdie (albeit not quite clear as to the merits) immediately protested too, with not inferior vehemence.

"Let him take care, that's all," said the defeated party, who was being rubbed down by a waiter after his recent fall on the dusty boards. "He don't knock me about for nothing, I can tell him that. A pretty state of things, if a man isn't to admire a handsome girl without being beat to pieces for it!"

This reflection appeared to have great weight with the young lady in the bar, who (adjusting her cap as she spoke, and glancing at a mirror) declared that it would be a very pretty state of things indeed; and that, if people were to be punished for actions so innocent and natural as that, there would be more people to be knocked down than there would be people to knock them down, and that she wondered what the gentleman meant by it, that she did.

"My dear girl," said the young gentleman in a low voice, advancing towards the sash-window.

"Nonsense, sir!" replied the young lady sharply, smiling, though, as she turned aside, and biting her lip (whereat Mrs. Browdie, who was still standing on the stairs, glanced at her with disdain, and called to her husband to come away).

"No, but listen to me," said the young man. "If admiration of a pretty face were criminal, I should be the most hopeless person alive, for I cannot resist one. It has the most extraordinary effect upon me, checks and controls me in the most furious and obstinate mood. You see what an effect yours has had upon me already."

"Oh! that's very pretty," replied the young lady, tossing her head, "but——"

"Yes, I know it's very pretty," said the young man, looking with an air of admiration in the barmaid's face; "I said so, you know, just this moment. But beauty should be spoken of respectfully—respectfully, and in proper terms, and with a becoming sense of its worth and excellence, whereas this fellow has no more notion——"

The young lady interrupted the conversation at this point, by thrusting her head out of the bar window, and inquiring of the waiter in a shrill voice whether that young man who had been knocked down was going to stand in the passage all night, or whether the entrance was to be left clear for other people. The waiters

taking the hint, and communicating it to the hostlers, were not slow to change their tone too, and the result was, that the unfortunate victim was bundled out in a twinkling.

"I am sure I have seen that fellow before," said Nicholas.

"Indeed!" replied his new acquaintance.

"I am certain of it," said Nicholas, pausing to reflect. "Where can I have—stop!—yes, to be sure—he belongs to a register office up at the West-end of the town. I knew I recollected the face."

It was, indeed, Tom—the ugly clerk.

"That's odd enough!" said Nicholas, ruminating upon the strange manner in which the register office seemed to start up and stare him in the face every now and then, and when he least expected it.

"I am much obliged to you for your kind advocacy of my cause when it most needed an advocate," said the young man, laughing, and drawing a card from his pocket. "Perhaps you'll do me the favour to let me know where I can thank you."

Nicholas took the card, and, glancing at it involuntarily as he returned the compliment, evinced very great surprise.

"Mr. Frank Cheeryble!" said Nicholas. "Surely not the nephew of Cheeryble Brothers, who is expected to-morrow!"

"I don't usually call myself the nephew of the firm," returned Mr. Frank good-humouredly; "but, of the two excellent individuals who compose it, I am proud to say I *am* the nephew. And you, I see, are Mr. Nickleby, of whom I have heard so much! This is a most unexpected meeting, but not the less welcome, I assure you."

Nicholas responded to these compliments with others of the same kind, and they shook hands warmly. Then he introduced John Browdie, who had remained in a state of great admiration ever since the young lady in the bar had been so skilfully won over to the right side. Then Mrs. John Browdie was introduced, and finally they all went up-stairs together, and spent the next half-hour with great satisfaction and mutual entertainment; Mrs. John Browdie beginning the conversation by declaring that of all the made-up things she ever saw, that young woman below-stairs was the vainest and the plainest.

This Mr. Frank Cheeryble, although, to judge from what had recently taken place, a hot-headed young man (which is not an absolute miracle and phenomenon in nature) was a sprightly, good-humoured, pleasant fellow, with much both in his countenance and disposition that reminded Nicholas very strongly of the kind-hearted brothers. His manner was as unaffected as theirs, and his demeanour full of that heartiness which, to most people who have anything generous in their composition, is peculiarly prepossessing. Add to this, that he was good-looking and intelligent, had a plentiful share of vivacity, was extremely cheerful, and accommodated himself in five minutes' time to all John Browdie's oddities with as much ease as if he had known him from a boy; and it will be a source of no great wonder that, when they parted for the night, he had produced a most favourable impression, not only upon the worthy Yorkshireman and his wife, but upon Nicholas also, who, revolving all these things in his mind as he made the best of his way home, arrived at the conclusion that he had laid the foundation of a most agreeable and desirable acquaintance.

"But it's a most extraordinary thing about that register-office fellow!" thought Nicholas. "Is it likely that this nephew can know anything about that beautiful girl? When Tim Linkinwater gave me to understand the other day that he was coming to take a share in the business here, he said he had been superintending it in Germany for four years, and that during the last six months he had been engaged in establishing an agency in the north of England. That's four years and a half—four years and a half. She can't be more than seventeen—say eighteen at the outside. She was quite a child when he went away, then. I should say he knew nothing about her, and had never seen her, so *he* can give me no information. At all events," thought Nicholas, coming to the real point in his mind, "there can be no danger of any prior occupation of her affections in that quarter; that's quite clear."

Is selfishness a necessary ingredient in the composition of that passion called love, or does it deserve all the fine things which poets, in the exercise of their undoubted vocation, have said of it? There are, no doubt, authenticated instances of gentlemen having given up ladies, and ladies having given up gentlemen, to meritorious rivals, under circumstances of great high-mindedness; but is it quite established that the majority of such ladies and gentlemen have not made a virtue of necessity, and nobly resigned what was beyond their reach; as a private soldier might register a vow never to accept the order of the Garter, or a poor curate of great piety and learning, but of no family—save a very large family of children—might renounce a bishopric?

Here was Nicholas Nickleby, who would have scorned the thought of counting how the chances stood of his rising in favour or fortune with the brothers Cheeryble, now that their nephew had returned, already deep in calculations whether that same nephew was likely to rival him in the affections of the fair unknown —discussing the matter with himself, too, as gravely as if, with that one exception, it were all settled; and recurring to the subject again and again, and feeling quite indignant and ill used at the notion of anybody else making love to one with whom he had never exchanged a word in all his life. To be sure, he exaggerated rather than depreciated the merits of his new acquaintance; but still he took it as a kind of personal offence that he should have any merits at all—in the eyes of this particular young lady, that is; for elsewhere he was quite welcome to have as many as he pleased. There was undoubted selfishness in all this, and yet Nicholas was of a most free and generous nature, with as few mean or sordid thoughts, perhaps, as ever fell to the lot of any man; and there is no reason to suppose that, being in love, he felt and thought differently from other people in the like sublime condition.

He did not stop to set on foot an inquiry into his train of thought or state of feeling, however; but went thinking on all the way home, and continued to dream on in the same strain all night. For, having satisfied himself that Frank Cheeryble could have no knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the mysterious young lady, it began to occur to him that even he himself might never see her again; upon which hypothesis he built up a very ingenious succession of tormenting ideas, which answered his purpose even better than the vision of Mr. Frank Cheeryble, and tantalised and worried him, waking and sleeping.

Notwithstanding all that has been said and sung to the contrary, there is no well-established case of morning having either deferred or hastened its approach by the term of an hour or so for the mere gratification of a splenetic feeling against some unoffending lover: the sun having, in the discharge of his public duty, as the books of precedent report, invariably risen according to the almanacs, and without suffering himself to be swayed by any private considerations. So, morning came as usual, and with it business hours, and with them Mr. Frank Cheeryble, and with him a long train of smiles and welcomes from the worthy brothers, and a more grave and clerk-like, but scarcely less hearty, reception from Mr. Timothy Linkinwater.

"That Mr. Frank and Mr. Nickleby should have met last night," said Tim Linkinwater, getting slowly off his stool, and looking round the counting-house with his back planted against the desk, as was his custom when he had anything very particular to say—"that those two young men should have met last night in that manner is, I say, a coincidence—a remarkable coincidence. Why, I don't believe, now," added Tim, taking off his spectacles, and smiling as with gentle pride, "that there's such a place in all the world for coincidences as London is!"

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Frank; "but——"

"Don't know about it, Mr. Francis!" interrupted Tim with an obstinate air. "Well, but let us know. If there is any better place for such things, where is it? Is it in Europe? No, that it isn't. Is it in Asia? Why, of course it's not. Is it in Africa? Not a bit of it. Is it in America? *You* know better than that, at all events. Well then," said Tim, folding his arms resolutely, "where is it?"

"I was not about to dispute the point, Tim," said young Cheeryble, laughing. "I am not such a heretic as that. All I was going to say was, that I hold myself under an obligation to the coincidence, that's all."

"Oh! if you don't dispute it," said Tim, quite satisfied, "that's another thing. I'll tell you what, though—I wish you had. I wish you or anybody would. I would so put that man down," said Tim, tapping the forefinger of his left hand emphatically with his spectacles, "so put that man down by argument——"

It was quite impossible to find language to express the degree of mental prostration to which such an adventurous wight would be reduced in the keen encounter with Tim Linkinwater, so Tim gave up the rest of his declaration in pure lack of words, and mounted his stool again.

"We may consider ourselves, brother Ned," said Charles after he had patted Tim Linkinwater approvingly on the back, "very fortunate in having two such young men about us as our nephew Frank and Mr. Nickleby. It should be a source of great satisfaction and pleasure to us."

"Certainly, Charles, certainly," returned the other.

"Of Tim," added brother Ned, "I say nothing whatever, because Tim is a mere child—an infant—a nobody—that we never think of or take into account at all. Tim, you villain, what do you say to that, sir?"

"I am jealous of both of 'em," said Tim,

"and mean to look out for another situation; so provide yourselves, gentlemen, if you please."

Tim thought this such an exquisite, unparalleled, and most extraordinary joke, that he laid his pen upon the inkstand, and rather tumbling off his stool than getting down with his usual deliberation, laughed till he was quite faint, shaking his head all the time so that little particles of powder flew palpably about the office. Nor were the brothers at all behindhand, for they laughed almost as heartily at the ludicrous idea of any voluntary separation between themselves and old Tim. Nicholas and Mr. Frank laughed quite boisterously, perhaps to conceal some other emotion awakened by this little incident, (and so, indeed, did the three old fellows after the first burst,) so perhaps there was as much keen enjoyment and relish in that laugh, altogether, as the politest assembly ever derived from the most poignant witticism uttered at any one person's expense.

"Mr. Nickleby," said brother Charles, calling him aside, and taking him kindly by the hand, "I—I—am anxious, my dear sir, to see that you are properly and comfortably settled in the cottage. We cannot allow those who serve us well to labour under any privation or discomfort that it is in our power to remove. I wish, too, to see your mother and sister,—to know them, Mr. Nickleby, and have an opportunity of relieving their minds by assuring them that any trifling service we have been able to do them is a great deal more than repaid by the zeal and ardour you display.—Not a word, my dear sir, I beg. To-morrow is Sunday. I shall make bold to come out at tea-time, and take the chance of finding you at home; if you are not, you know, or the ladies should feel a delicacy in being intruded on, and would rather not be known to me just now, why I can come again another time, any other time would do for me. Let it remain upon that understanding. Brother Ned, my dear fellow, let me have a word with you this way."

The twins went out of the office arm-in-arm, and Nicholas, who saw in this act of kindness, and many others of which he had been the subject that morning, only so many delicate renewals, on the arrival of their nephew, of the kind assurance which the brothers had given him in his absence, could scarcely feel sufficient admiration and gratitude for such extraordinary consideration.

The intelligence that they were to have a visitor—and such a visitor—next day, awakened in the breast of Mrs. Nickleby mingled feelings of exultation and regret; for whereas, on the one hand, she hailed it as an omen of her speedy restoration to good society and the almost-forgotten pleasures of morning calls and evening tea-drinkings, she could not, on the other, but reflect with bitterness of spirit on the absence of a silver teapot with an ivory knob on the lid, and a milk-jug to match, which had been the pride of her heart in days of yore, and had been kept from year's end to year's end wrapped up in wash-leather on a certain top shelf, which now presented itself in lively colours to her sorrowing imagination.

"I wonder who's got that spice box," said Mrs. Nickleby, shaking her head. "It used to stand in the left-hand corner, next but two to the pickled onions. You remember that spice box, Kate?"

"Perfectly well, mamma."

"I shouldn't think you did, Kate," returned Mrs. Nickleby in a severe manner, "talking about it in that cold and unfeeling way! If there is any one thing that vexes me in these losses more than the losses themselves, I do protest and declare," said Mrs. Nickleby, rubbing her nose with an impassioned air, "that it is to have people about me who take things with such provoking calmness."

"My dear mamma," said Kate, stealing her arm round her mother's neck, "why do you say what I know you cannot seriously mean or think, or why be angry with me for being happy and content? You and Nicholas are left to me, we are together once again, and what regard can I have for a few trifling things of which we never feel the want? When I have seen all the misery and desolation that death can bring, and known the lonesome feeling of being solitary and alone in crowds, and all the agony of separation in grief and poverty when we most needed comfort and support from each other, can you wonder that I look upon this as a place of such delicious quiet and rest, that, with you beside me, I have nothing to wish for or regret? There was a time, and not long since, when all the comforts of our old home did come back upon me, I own, very often—oftener than you would think, perhaps—but I affected to care nothing for them, in the hope that you would so be brought to regret them the less. I was not insensible, indeed. I might have felt happier if I had been. Dear mamma," said Kate in great agitation, "I know no difference between this home and that in which we were all so happy for so many years, except that the kindest and gentlest heart that ever ached on earth has passed in peace to heaven."

"Kate, my dear Kate!" cried Mrs. Nickleby, folding her in her arms.

"I have so often thought," sobbed Kate, "of all his kind words—of the last time he looked into my little room as he passed up-stairs to bed, and said 'God bless you, darling!' There was a paleness in his face, mamma—the broken heart—I know it was—I little thought so—then——"

A gush of tears came to her relief, and Kate laid her head upon her mother's breast, and wept like a little child.

It is an exquisite and beautiful thing in our nature, that when the heart is touched and softened by some tranquil happiness or affectionate feeling, the memory of the dead comes over it most powerfully and irresistibly. It would almost seem as though our better thoughts and sympathies were charms, in virtue of which the soul is enabled to hold some vague and mysterious intercourse with the spirits of those whom we dearly loved in life. Alas! how often and how long may those patient angels hover above us, watching for the spell which is so seldom uttered, and so soon forgotten!

Poor Mrs. Nickleby, accustomed to give ready utterance to whatever came uppermost in her mind, had never conceived the possibility of her daughter's dwelling upon these thoughts in secret, the more especially as no hard trial or querulous reproach had ever drawn them from her. But now, when the happiness of all that Nicholas had just told them, and of their new and peaceful life, brought these recollections so strongly upon Kate that she could not suppress them, Mrs. Nickleby began to have a glimmering that she had been rather thoughtless now and then, and was conscious of something like self-reproach as she embraced her daughter, and yielded to the emotions which such a conversation naturally awakened.

There was a mighty bustle that night, and a vast quantity of preparation for the expected visitor, and a very large nosegay was brought from a gardener's hard by, and cut up into a number of very small ones, with which Mrs. Nickleby would have garnished the little sitting-room, in a style that certainly could not have failed to attract anybody's attention, if Kate had not offered to spare her the trouble, and arranged them in the prettiest and neatest manner possible. If the cottage ever looked pretty, it must have been on such a bright and sunshiny day as the next day was. But Smike's pride in the garden, or Mrs. Nickleby's in the condition of the furniture, or Kate's in everything, was nothing to the pride with which Nicholas looked at Kate herself; and surely the costliest mansion in all England might have found in her beautiful face and graceful form its most exquisite and peerless ornament.

About six o'clock in the afternoon Mrs. Nickleby was thrown into a great flutter of spirits by the long-expected knock at the door, nor was this flutter at all composed by the audible tread of two pair of boots in the passage, which Mrs. Nickleby augured, in a breathless state, must be "the two Mr. Cheerybles;" as it certainly was, though not the two Mrs. Nickleby expected, because it was Mr. Charles Cheeryble, and his nephew, Mr. Frank, who made a thousand apologies for his intrusion, which Mrs. Nickleby (having tea-spoons enough and to spare for all) most graciously received. Nor did the appearance of this unexpected visitor occasion the least embarrassment, (save in Kate, and that only to the extent of a blush or two at first,) for the old gentleman was so kind and cordial, and the young gentleman imitated him in this respect so well, that the usual stiffness and formality of a first meeting showed no signs of appearing, and Kate really more than once detected herself in the very act of wondering when it was going to begin.

At the tea-table there was plenty of conversation on a great variety of subjects, nor were there wanting jocose matters of discussion, such as they were; for young Mr. Cheeryble's recent stay in Germany happening to be alluded to, old Mr. Cheeryble informed the company that the aforesaid young Mr. Cheeryble was suspected to have fallen deeply in love with the daughter of a certain German burgomaster. This accusation young Mr. Cheeryble most indignantly repelled, upon which Mrs. Nickleby slily remarked that she suspected, from the very warmth of the denial, there must be something in it. Young Mr. Cheeryble then earnestly entreated old Mr. Cheeryble to confess that it was all a jest, which old Mr. Cheeryble at last did, young Mr. Cheeryble being so much in earnest about it, that—as Mrs. Nickleby said many thousand times afterwards in recalling the scene—he "quite coloured," which she rightly considered a memorable circumstance, and one worthy of remark, young men not being, as a class, remarkable for modesty or self-denial, especially when there is a lady in the case, when, if they colour at all, it is rather their practice to colour the story, and not themselves.

After tea there was a walk in the garden, and, the evening being very fine, they strolled out at the garden-gate into some lanes and by-roads, and sauntered up and down until it grew quite

dark. The time seemed to pass very quickly with all the party. Kate went first, leaning upon her brother's arm, and talking with him and Mr. Frank Cheeryble; and Mrs. Nickleby and the elder gentleman followed at a short distance, the kindness of the good merchant, his interest in the welfare of Nicholas, and his admiration of Kate, so operating upon the good lady's feelings, that the usual current of her speech was confined within very narrow and circumscribed limits. Smike (who, if he had ever been an object of interest in his life, had been one that day) accompanied them, joining sometimes one group and sometimes the other, as brother Charles, laying his hand upon his shoulder, bade him walk with him, or Nicholas, looking smilingly round, beckoned him to come and talk with the old friend who understood him best, and who could win a smile into his care-worn face when none else could.

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins; but it cannot be the pride of a mother in her children, for that is a compound of two cardinal virtues—faith and hope. This was the pride which swelled Mrs. Nickleby's heart that night, and this it was which left upon her face, glistening in the light when they returned home, traces of the most grateful tears she had ever shed.

There was a quiet mirth about the little supper, which harmonised exactly with this tone of feeling, and at length the two gentlemen took their leave. There was one circumstance in the leave-taking which occasioned a vast deal of smiling and pleasantry, and that was, that Mr. Frank Cheeryble offered his hand to Kate twice over, quite forgetting that he had bade her adieu already. This was held by the elder Mr. Cheeryble to be a convincing proof that he was thinking of his German flame, and the jest occasioned immense laughter. So easy is it to move light hearts.

In short, it was a day of serene and tranquil happiness; and as we all have some bright day—many of us, let us hope, among a crowd of others—to which we revert with particular delight, so this one was often looked back to afterwards, as holding a conspicuous place in the calendar of those who shared it.

Was there one exception, and that one he who needed to have been most happy?

Who was that who, in the silence of his own chamber, sunk upon his knees to pray as his first friend had taught him, and, folding his hands and stretching them wildly in the air, fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief?

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. RALPH NICKLEBY CUTS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE. IT WOULD ALSO APPEAR, FROM THE CONTENTS HEREOF, THAT A JOKE, EVEN BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE, MAY BE SOMETIMES CARRIED TOO FAR.

THERE are some men who, living with the one object of enriching themselves, no matter by what means, and being perfectly conscious of the baseness and rascality of the means which they will use every day towards this end, affect nevertheless—even to themselves—a high tone of moral rectitude, and shake their heads and sigh over the depravity of the world. Some of the craftiest scoundrels that ever walked this earth, or rather—for walking implies, at least, an erect position and the bearing of a man—that ever crawled and crept through life by its dirtiest and narrowest ways, will gravely jot down in diaries the events of every day, and keep a regular debtor and creditor account with Heaven, which shall always show a floating balance in their own favour. Whether this is a gratuitous (the only gratuitous) part of the falsehood and trickery of such men's lives, or whether they really hope to cheat Heaven itself, and lay up treasure in the next world by the same process which has enabled them to lay up treasure in this—not to question how it is, so it is. And, doubtless, such book-keeping (like certain autobiographies which have enlightened the world) cannot fail to prove serviceable, in the one respect of sparing the recording Angel some time and labour.

Ralph Nickleby was not a man of this stamp. Stern, unyielding, dogged, and impenetrable, Ralph cared for nothing in life, or beyond it, save the gratification of two passions: avarice, the first and predominant appetite of his nature, and hatred, the second. Affecting to consider himself but a type of all humanity, he was at little pains to conceal his true character from the world in general, and in his own heart he exulted over and cherished every bad design as it had birth. The only scriptural admonition that Ralph Nickleby heeded, in the letter, was, "Know thyself." He knew himself well, and, choosing to imagine that all mankind were cast in the same mould, hated them; for, though no man hates himself, the coldest among us having too much self-love for that, yet most men unconsciously judge the world from themselves, and it will be very generally found that those who sneer habitually at human nature, and affect to despise it, are among its worst and least pleasant samples.

But the present business of these adventures is with Ralph himself, who stood regarding Newman Noggs with a heavy frown, while that worthy took off his fingerless gloves, and spreading them carefully on the palm of his left hand, and flattening them with his right to take the creases out, proceeded to roll them up with an absent air, as if he were utterly regardless of all things else, in the deep interest of the ceremonial.

"Gone out of town!" said Ralph slowly. "A mistake of yours. Go back again."

"No mistake," returned Newman. "Not even going;—gone."

"Has he turned girl or baby?" muttered Ralph with a fretful gesture.

"I don't know," said Newman, "but he's gone."

The repetition of the word "gone" seemed to afford Newman Noggs inexpressible delight, in proportion as it annoyed Ralph Nickleby. He uttered the word with a full round emphasis, dwelling upon it as long as he decently could, and, when he could hold out no longer without attracting observation, stood gasping it to himself, as if even that were a satisfaction.

"And *where* has he gone?" said Ralph.

"France," replied Newman. "Danger of another attack of erysipelas—a worse attack—in the head. So the doctors ordered him off. And he's gone."

"And Lord Frederick——?" began Ralph.

"He's gone too," replied Newman.

"And he carries his drubbing with him, does he?" said Ralph, turning away—"pockets his bruises, and sneaks off without the retaliation of a word, or seeking the smallest reparation!"

"He's too ill," said Newman.

"Too ill!" repeated Ralph. "Why, *I* would have it if I were dying; in that case I should only be the more determined to have it, and that without delay—I mean if I were he. But he's too ill! Poor Sir Mulberry! Too ill!"

Uttering these words with supreme contempt and great irritation of manner, Ralph signed hastily to Newman to leave the room; and, throwing himself into his chair, beat his foot impatiently upon the ground.

"There is some spell about that boy," said Ralph, grinding his teeth. "Circumstances conspire to help him. Talk of fortune's favours! What is even money to such Devil's luck as this?"

He thrust his hands impatiently into his pockets, but, notwithstanding his previous reflection, there was some consolation there, for his face relaxed a little; and, although there was still a deep frown upon the contracted brow, it was one of calculation, and not of disappointment.

"This Hawk will come back, however," muttered Ralph; "and if I know the man—and I should by this time—his wrath will have lost nothing of its violence in the meanwhile. Obliged to live in retirement—the monotony of a sick-room to a man of his habits—no life—no drink—no play—nothing that he likes and lives by. He is not likely to forget his obligations to the cause of all this. Few men would; but he of all others—no, no!"

He smiled and shook his head, and, resting his chin upon his hand, fell a musing, and smiled again. After a time he rose and rang the bell.

"That Mr. Squeers; has he been here?" said Ralph.

"He was here last night. I left him here when I went home," returned Newman.

"I know that, fool, do I not?" said Ralph irascibly. "Has he been here since? Was he here this morning?"

"No," bawled Newman in a very loud key.

"If he comes while I am out—he is pretty sure to be here by nine to-night—let him wait. And if there's another man with him, as there will be—perhaps," said Ralph, checking himself, "let him wait too."

"Let 'em both wait?" said Newman.

"Ay," replied Ralph, turning upon him with an angry look. "Help me on with this spencer, and don't repeat after me, like a croaking parrot."

"I wish I was a parrot," said Newman sulkily.

"I wish you were," rejoined Ralph, drawing his spencer on; "I'd have wrung your neck long ago."

Newman returned no answer to this compliment, but looked over Ralph's shoulder for an instant, (he was adjusting the collar of the spencer behind, just then,) as if he were strongly disposed to tweak him by the nose. Meeting Ralph's eye, however, he suddenly recalled his wandering fingers, and rubbed his own red nose with a vehemence quite astonishing.

Bestowing no further notice upon his eccentric follower than a threatening look, and an admonition to be careful and make no mistake, Ralph took his hat and gloves, and walked out.

He appeared to have a very extraordinary and miscellaneous connection, and very odd calls he made—some at great rich houses, and some at small poor ones—but all upon one subject: money. His face was a talisman to the porters and servants of his more dashing

clients, and procured him ready admission, though he trudged on foot, and others, who were denied, rattled to the door in carriages. Here he was all softness and cringing civility; his step so light, that it scarcely produced a sound upon the thick carpets; his voice so soft, that it was not audible beyond the person to whom it was addressed. But in the poorer habitations Ralph was another man; his boots creaked upon the passage floor as he walked boldly in; his voice was harsh and loud as he demanded the money that was overdue; his threats were coarse and angry. With another class of customers, Ralph was again another man. These were attorneys of more than doubtful reputation, who helped him to new business, or raised fresh profits upon old. With them Ralph was familiar and jocose—humorous upon the topics of the day, and especially pleasant upon bankruptcies and pecuniary difficulties that made good for trade. In short, it would have been difficult to have recognised the same man under these various aspects, but for the bulky leather case full of bills and notes which

"FELL UPON HIS FACE IN A PASSION OF BITTER GRIEF."

he drew from his pocket at every house, and the constant repetition of the same complaint, (varied only in tone and style of delivery), that the world thought him rich, and that perhaps he might be if he had his own; but there was no getting money in when it was once out, either principal or interest, and it was a hard matter to live—even to live from day to day.

It was evening before a long round of such visits (interrupted only by a scanty dinner at an eating-house) terminated at Pimlico, and Ralph walked along St. James's Park, on his way home.

There were some deep schemes in his head, as the puckered brow and firmly-set mouth would have abundantly testified, even if they had been unaccompanied by a complete indifference to, or unconsciousness of, the objects about him. So complete was his abstraction, however, that Ralph, usually as quick sighted as any man, did not observe that he was followed by a shambling figure, which at one time stole behind him with noiseless footsteps, at another crept a few paces before him, and at another glided along by his side; at all times regarding him with an eye so keen, and a look so eager and attentive, that it

was more like the expression of an intrusive face in some powerful picture or strongly-marked dream than the scrutiny even of a most interested and anxious observer.

The sky had been lowering and dark for some time, and the commencement of a violent storm of rain drove Ralph for shelter to a tree. He was leaning against it with folded arms, still buried in thought, when, happening to raise his eyes, he suddenly met those of a man who, creeping round the trunk, peered into his face with a searching look. There was something in the usurer's expression at the moment which the man appeared to remember well, for it decided him; and, stepping close up to Ralph, he pronounced his name.

Astonished for the moment, Ralph fell back a couple of paces, and surveyed him from head to foot. A spare, dark, withered man, of about his own age, with a stooping body, and a very sinister face rendered more ill favoured by hollow and hungry cheeks, deeply sunburnt, and thick black eyebrows, blacker in contrast with the perfect whiteness of his hair; roughly clothed in shabby garments, of a strange and uncouth make; and having about him an indefinable manner of depression and degradation—this, for a moment, was all he saw. But he looked again, and the face and person seemed gradually to grow less strange; to change as he looked, to subside and soften into lineaments that were familiar, until at last they resolved themselves, as if by some strange optical illusion, into those of one whom he had known for many years, and forgotten and lost sight of for nearly as many more.

The man saw that the recognition was mutual, and beckoning to Ralph to take his former place under the tree, and not to stand in the falling rain, of which, in his first surprise, he had been quite regardless, addressed him in a hoarse, faint tone.

"You would hardly have known me from my voice, I suppose, Mr. Nickleby?" he said.

"No," returned Ralph, bending a severe look upon him. "Though there is something in that that I remember now."

"There is little in me that you can call to mind as having been there eight years ago, I dare say?" observed the other.

"Quite enough," said Ralph carelessly, and averting his face. "More than enough."

"If I had remained in doubt about *you*, Mr. Nickleby," said the other, "this reception, and *your* manner, would have decided me very soon."

"Did you expect any other?" asked Ralph sharply.

"No!" said the man.

"You were right," retorted Ralph; "and, as you feel no surprise, need express none."

"Mr. Nickleby," said the man bluntly after a brief pause, during which he had seemed to struggle with an inclination to answer him by some reproach, "will you hear a few words that I have to say?"

"I am obliged to wait here till the rain holds a little," said Ralph, looking abroad. "If you talk, sir, I shall not put my fingers in my ears, though your talking may have as much effect as if I did."

"I was once in your confidence——" thus his companion began. Ralph looked round, and smiled involuntarily.

"Well," said the other, "as much in your confidence as you ever chose to let anybody be."

"Ah!" rejoined Ralph, folding his arms; "that's another thing—quite another thing."

"Don't let us play upon words, Mr. Nickleby, in the name of humanity."

"Of what?" said Ralph.

"Of humanity," replied the other sternly: "I am hungry and in want. If the change that you must see in me after so long an absence—must see, for I, upon whom it has come by slow and hard degrees, see it and know it well—will not move you to pity, let the knowledge that bread; not the daily bread of the Lord's Prayer, which, as it is offered up in cities like this, is understood to include half the luxuries of the world for the rich, and just as much coarse food as will support life for the poor—not that, but bread, a crust of dry hard bread, is beyond my reach to-day—let that have some weight with you, if nothing else has."

"If this is the usual form in which you beg, sir," said Ralph, "you have studied your part well; but, if you will take advice from one who knows something of the world and its ways, I should recommend a lower tone—a little lower tone, or you stand a fair chance of being starved in good earnest."

As he said this, Ralph clenched his left wrist tightly with his right hand, and inclining his head a little on one side, and dropping his chin upon his breast, looked at him whom he addressed with a frowning, sullen face: the very picture of a man whom nothing could move or soften.

"Yesterday was my first day in London," said the old man, glancing at his travel-stained dress and worn shoes.

"It would have been better for you, I think, if it had been your last also," replied Ralph.

"I have been seeking you these two days, where I thought you were most likely to be found," resumed the other more humbly, "and I met you here at last, when I had almost given up the hope of encountering you, Mr. Nickleby."

He seemed to wait for some reply, but Ralph giving him none, he continued:

"I am a most miserable and wretched outcast, nearly sixty years old, and as destitute and helpless as a child of six."

"I am sixty years old, too," replied Ralph, "and am neither destitute nor helpless. Work. Don't make fine play-acting speeches about bread, but earn it."

"How?" cried the other. "Where? Show me the means. Will you give them to me—will you?"

"I did once," replied Ralph composedly; "you scarcely need ask me whether I will again."

"It's twenty years ago, or more," said the man in a suppressed voice, "since you and I fell out. You remember that? I claimed a share in the profits of some business I brought to you, and, as I persisted, you arrested me for an old advance of ten pounds, odd shillings—including interest at fifty per cent., or so."

"I remember something of it," replied Ralph carelessly. "What then?"

"That didn't part us," said the man. "I made submission, being on the wrong side of the bolts and bars; and, as you were not the made man then that you are now, you were glad enough to take back a clerk who wasn't overnice, and who knew something of the trade you drove."

"You begged and prayed, and I consented," returned Ralph. "That was kind of me. Perhaps I did want you—I forget. I should think I did, or you would have begged in vain. You were useful—not too honest, not too delicate, not too nice of hand or heart—but useful."

"Useful indeed!" said the man. "Come! You had pinched and ground me down for some years before that, but I had served you faithfully up to that time, in spite of all your dog's usage—had I?"

Ralph made no reply.

"Had I?" said the man again.

"You had had your wages," rejoined Ralph, "and had done your work. We stood on equal ground so far, and could both cry quits."

"Then, but not afterwards," said the other.

"Not afterwards, certainly, nor even then, for (as you have just said) you owed me money, and do still," replied Ralph.

"That's not all," said the man eagerly. "That's not all. Mark that. I didn't forget that old sore, trust me. Partly in remembrance of that, and partly in the hope of making money some day by the scheme, I took advantage of my position about you, and possessed myself of a hold upon you, which you would give half of all you have to know, and never can know but through me. I left you—long after that time, remember—and, for some poor trickery that came within the law, but was nothing to what you money-makers daily practise just outside its bounds, was sent away a convict for seven years. I have returned what you see me. Now, Mr. Nickleby," said the man with a strange mixture of humility and sense of power, "what help and assistance will you give me—what bribe, to speak out plainly? My expectations are not monstrous, but I must live, and to live I must eat and drink. Money is on your side, and hunger and thirst on mine. You may drive an easy bargain."

"Is that all?" said Ralph, still eyeing his companion with the same steady look, and moving nothing but his lips.

"It depends on you, Mr. Nickleby, whether that's all or not," was the rejoinder.

"Why, then, harkye, Mr. ——, I don't know by what name I am to call you," said Ralph.

"By my old one, if you like."

"Why, then, harkye, Mr. Brooker," said Ralph in his harshest accents, "and don't expect to draw another speech from me—harkye, sir. I know you of old for a ready scoundrel, but you never had a stout heart; and hard work, with (maybe) chains upon those legs of yours, and shorter food than when I 'pinched' and 'ground' you, has blunted your wits, or you would not come with such a tale as this to me. You a hold upon me! Keep it, or publish it to the world, if you like."

"I can't do that," interposed Brooker. "That wouldn't serve me."

"Wouldn't it?" said Ralph. "It will serve you as much as bringing it to me, I promise you. To be plain with you, I am a careful man, and know my affairs thoroughly. I know the world, and the world knows me. Whatever you gleaned, or heard, or saw, when you served me, the world knows and magnifies already. You could tell it nothing that would surprise it—unless, indeed, it redounded to my credit or honour, and then it would scout you for a liar. And yet I don't find business slack, or clients scrupulous. Quite the contrary. I am reviled or threatened every day by one man or another," said Ralph; "but things roll on just the same, and I don't grow poorer either."

"I neither revile nor threaten," rejoined the man. "I can tell you of what you have lost by my act, what I only can restore, and what, if I die without restoring, dies with me, and never can be regained."

"I tell my money pretty accurately, and generally keep it in my own custody," said Ralph. "I look sharply after most men that I deal with, and most of all I looked sharply after you. You are welcome to all you have kept from me."

"Are those of your own name dear to you?" said the man emphatically. "If they are——"

"They are not," returned Ralph, exasperated at this perseverance, and the thought of Nicholas, which the last question awakened. "They are not. If you had come as a common beggar, I might have thrown a sixpence to you in remembrance of the clever knave you used to be; but, since you try to palm these stale tricks upon one you might have known better, I'll not part with a halfpenny—nor would I to save you from rotting. And remember this, 'scape-gallows," said Ralph, menacing him with his hand, "that if we meet again, and you so much as notice me by one begging gesture, you shall see the inside of a gaol once more, and tighten this hold upon me in intervals of the hard labour that vagabonds are put to. There's my answer to your trash. Take it."

With a disdainful scowl at the object of his anger, who met his eye, but uttered not a word, Ralph walked away at his usual pace, without manifesting the slightest curiosity to see what became of his late companion, or, indeed, once looking behind him. The man remained on the same spot, with his eyes fixed upon his retreating figure, until it was lost to view, and then drawing his arm about his chest, as if the damp and lack of food struck coldly to him, lingered with slouching steps by the wayside, and begged of those who passed along.

Ralph, in nowise moved by what had lately passed, further than as he had already expressed himself, walked deliberately on, and turning out of the Park, and leaving Golden Square on his right, took his way through some streets at the West-end of the town until he arrived in that particular one in which stood the residence of Madame Mantalini. The name of that lady no longer appeared on the flaming door-plate, that of Miss Knag being substituted in its stead; but the bonnets and dresses were still dimly visible in the first-floor windows by the decaying light of a summer's evening, and, excepting this ostensible alteration in the proprietorship, the establishment wore its old appearance.

"Humph!" muttered Ralph, drawing his hand across his mouth with a connoisseur-like air, and surveying the house from top to bottom; "these people look pretty well. They can't last long; but, if I know of their going in good time, I am safe, and a fair profit too. I must keep them closely in view—that's all."

So, nodding his head very complacently, Ralph was leaving the spot, when his quick ear caught the sound of a confused noise and hubbub of voices, mingled with a great running up and down stairs, in the very house which had been the subject of his scrutiny; and, while he was hesitating whether to knock at the door or listen at the keyhole a little longer, a female servant of Madame Mantalini's (whom he had often seen) opened it abruptly and bounced out, with her blue cap-ribbons streaming in the air.

"Hallo here! Stop!" cried Ralph. "What's the matter? Here am I. Didn't you hear me knock?"

"Oh, Mr. Nickleby, sir!" said the girl. "Go up, for the love of Gracious! Master's been and done it again."

"Done what?" said Ralph tartly. "What d'ye mean?"

"I knew he would if he was drove to it," cried the girl. "I said so all along."

"Come here, you silly wench," said Ralph, catching her by the wrist; "and don't carry family matters to the neighbours, destroying the credit of the establishment. Come here; do you hear me, girl?"

Without any further expostulation, he led, or rather pulled, the frightened handmaid into the house, and shut the door; then, bidding her walk up-stairs before him, followed without more ceremony.

Guided by the noise of a great many voices all talking together, and passing the girl, in his impatience, before they had ascended many steps, Ralph quickly reached the private sitting-room, when he was rather amazed by the confused and inexplicable scene in which he suddenly found himself.

There were all the young-lady workers, some with bonnets and some without, in various attitudes expressive of alarm and consternation; some gathered round Madame Mantalini, who was in tears upon one chair; and others round Miss Knag, who was in opposition tears upon another; and others round Mr. Mantalini, who was, perhaps, the most striking figure in the whole group, for Mr. Mantalini's legs were extended at full length upon the floor, and his head and shoulders were supported by a very tall footman, who didn't seem to know what to

do with them, and Mr. Mantalini's eyes were closed, and his face was pale and his hair was comparatively straight, and his whiskers and moustache were limp, and his teeth were clenched, and he had a little bottle in his right hand, and a little tea-spoon in his left; and his hands, arms, legs, and shoulders were all stiff and powerless. And yet Madame Mantalini was not weeping upon the body, but was scolding violently upon her chair; and all this amidst a clamour of tongues perfectly deafening, and which really appeared to have driven the unfortunate footman to the utmost verge of distraction.

"What is the matter here?" said Ralph, pressing forward.

At this inquiry the clamour was increased twenty-fold, and an astounding string of such shrill contradictions as "He's poisoned himself"—"He hasn't"—"Send for a doctor"—"Don't"—"He's dying"—"He isn't, he's only pretending"—with various other cries, poured forth with bewildering volubility, until Madame Mantalini was seen to address herself to Ralph, when female curiosity to know what she would say prevailed, and, as if by general consent, a dead silence, unbroken by a single whisper, instantaneously succeeded.

"Mr. Nickleby," said Madame Mantalini, "by what chance you came here, I don't know."

Here a gurgling voice was heard to ejaculate—as part of the wanderings of a sick man—the words "Demnition sweetness!" but nobody heeded them except the footman, who, being startled to hear such awful tones proceeding, as it were, from between his very fingers, dropped his master's head upon the floor with a pretty loud crash, and then, without an effort to lift it up, gazed upon the bystanders, as if he had done something rather clever than otherwise.

"I will, however," continued Madame Mantalini, drying her eyes, and speaking with great indignation, "say before you, and before everybody here, for the first time, and once for all, that I never will supply that man's extravagances and viciousness again. I have been a dupe and a fool to him long enough. In future, he shall support himself if he can, and then he may spend what money he pleases, upon whom and how he pleases; but it shall not be mine, and therefore you had better pause before you trust him further."

Thereupon Madame Mantalini, quite unmoved by some most pathetic lamentations on the part of her husband, that the apothecary had not mixed the prussic acid strong enough, and that he must take another bottle or two to finish the work he had in hand, entered into a catalogue of that amiable gentleman's gallantries, deceptions, extravagances, and infidelities (especially the last), winding up with a protest against being supposed to entertain the smallest remnant of regard for him; and adducing, in proof of the altered state of her affections, the circumstance of his having poisoned himself in private no less than six times within the last fortnight, and her not having once interfered by word or deed to save his life.

"And I insist on being separated and left to myself," said Madame Mantalini, sobbing. "If he dares to refuse me a separation, I'll have one in law—I can—and I hope this will be a warning to all girls who have seen this disgraceful exhibition."

Miss Knag, who was unquestionably the oldest girl in company, said, with great solemnity, that it would be a warning to *her*, and so did the young ladies generally, with the exception of one or two who appeared to entertain some doubts whether such whiskers could do wrong.

"Why do you say all this before so many listeners?" said Ralph in a low voice. "You know you are not in earnest."

"I *am* in earnest," replied Madame Mantalini aloud, and retreating towards Miss Knag.

"Well, but consider," reasoned Ralph, who had a great interest in the matter. "It would be well to reflect. A married woman has no property."

"Not a solitary single individual dem, my soul," said Mr. Mantalini, raising himself upon his elbow.

"I am quite aware of that," retorted Madame Mantalini, tossing her head; "and *I* have none. The business, the stock, this house, and everything in it, all belong to Miss Knag."

"That's quite true, Madame Mantalini," said Miss Knag, with whom her late employer had secretly come to an amicable understanding on this point. "Very true indeed, Madame Mantalini—hem—very true. And I never was more glad in all my life that I had strength of mind to resist matrimonial offers, no matter how advantageous, than I am when I think of my present position as compared with your most unfortunate and most undeserved one, Madame Mantalini."

"Demmit!" cried Mr. Mantalini, turning his head towards his wife. "Will it not slap and pinch the envious dowager, that dares to reflect upon its own delicious?"

But the day of Mr. Mantalini's blandishments had departed. "Miss Knag, sir," said his wife, "is my particular friend;" and, although Mr.

Mantalini leered till his eyes seemed in danger of never coming back to their right places again, Madame Mantalini showed no signs of softening.

To do the excellent Miss Knag justice, she had been mainly instrumental in bringing about this altered state of things, for finding, by daily experience, that there was no chance of the business thriving, or even continuing to exist, while Mr. Mantalini had any hand in the expenditure, and having now a considerable interest in its well-doing, she had sedulously applied herself to the investigation of some little

"I AM A MOST MISERABLE AND WRETCHED OUTCAST, NEARLY SIXTY YEARS OLD, AND AS DESTITUTE AND HELPLESS AS A CHILD OF SIX."

matters connected with that gentleman's private character, which she had so well elucidated and artfully imparted to Madame Mantalini, as to open her eyes more effectually than the closest and most philosophical reasoning could have done in a series of years. To which end, the accidental discovery by Miss Knag of some tender correspondence, in which Madame Mantalini was described as "old" and "ordinary," had most providentially contributed.

However, notwithstanding her firmness, Madame Mantalini wept very piteously; and, as

she leant upon Miss Knag, and signed towards the door, that young lady, and all the other young ladies with sympathising faces, proceeded to bear her out.

"Nickleby," said Mr. Mantalini in tears, "you have been made a witness to this demnition cruelty, on the part of the demdest enslaver and captivater that never was, oh dem! I forgive that woman."

"Forgive!" repeated Madame Mantalini angrily.

"I do forgive her, Nickleby," said Mr. Mantalini. "You will blame me, the world will blame me, the women will blame me; everybody will laugh, and scoff, and smile, and grin most demnebly. They will say, 'She had a blessing. She did not know it. He was too weak; he was too good; he was a dem'd fine fellow, but he loved too strong; he could not bear her to be cross, and call him wicked names. It was a dem'd case, there never was a demder.' —But I forgive her"

With this affecting speech Mr. Mantalini fell down again very flat, and lay to all appearance without sense or motion until all the females had left the room, when he came cautiously into a sitting posture, and confronted Ralph with a very blank face, and the little bottle still in one hand, and the tea-spoon in the other.

"You may put away those fooleries now, and live by your wits again," said Ralph, coolly putting on his hat.

"Demmit, Nickleby, you're not serious?"

"I seldom joke," said Ralph. "Good night."

"No, but Nickleby——" said Mantalini.

"I am wrong, perhaps," rejoined Ralph. "I hope so. You should know best. Good night."

Affecting not to hear his entreaties that he would stay and advise with him, Ralph left the crest-fallen Mr. Mantalini to his meditations, and left the house quietly.

"Oho!" he said, "sets the wind that way so soon? Half knave and half fool, and detected in both characters—hum—I think your day is over, sir."

As he said this, he made some memorandum in his pocket-book in which Mr. Mantalini's name figured conspicuously, and, finding by his watch that it was between nine and ten o'clock, made all speed home.

"Are they here?" was the first question he asked of Newman.

Newman nodded. "Been here half an hour."

"Two of them? one a fat sleek man?"

"Ay," said Newman. "In your room now."

"Good," rejoined Ralph. "Get me a coach."

"A coach! What, you—going to—eh?" stammered Newman.

Ralph angrily repeated his orders, and Noggs, who might well have been excused for wondering at such an unusual and extraordinary circumstance—for he had never seen Ralph in a coach in his life—departed on his errand, and presently returned with the conveyance.

Into it went Mr. Squeers, and Ralph, and the third man, whom Newman Noggs had never seen. Newman stood upon the door-step to see them off, not troubling himself to wonder where or upon what business they were going, until he chanced by mere accident to hear Ralph name the address whither the coachman was to drive.

Quick as lightning, and in a state of the most extreme wonder, Newman darted into his little office for his hat, and limped after the coach as if with the intention of getting up behind; but in this design he was balked, for it had too much the start of him, and was soon hopelessly ahead, leaving him gaping in the empty street.

"I don't know, though," said Noggs, stopping for breath, "any good that I could have done by going too. He would have seen me if I had. Drive *there!* What can come of this? If I had only known it yesterday I could have told—— Drive there! There's mischief in it. There must be."

His reflections were interrupted by a grey-haired man of a very remarkable, though far from prepossessing appearance, who, coming stealthily towards him, solicited relief.

Newman, still cogitating deeply, turned away; but the man followed him, and pressed him with such a tale of misery, that Newman (who might have been considered a hopeless person to beg from, and who had little enough to give) looked into his hat for some halfpence which he usually kept screwed up, when he had any, in a corner of his pocket-handkerchief.

While he was busily untwisting the knot with his teeth, the man said something which attracted his attention; whatever that something was, it led to something else, and in the end he and Newman walked away side by side—the strange man talking earnestly, and Newman listening.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONTAINING MATTER OF A SURPRISING KIND.

AS we gang awa' fra' Lunnun to-morrow neeght, and as I dinnot know that I was e'er so happy in a' my days, Misther Nickleby,

Ding! but I *will* tak' anoother glass to our next merry meeting!"

So said John Browdie, rubbing his hands with great joyousness, and looking round him with a ruddy shining face, quite in keeping with the declaration.

The time at which John found himself in this enviable condition was the same evening to which the last chapter bore reference; the place was the cottage; and the assembled company were Nicholas, Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Browdie, Kate Nickleby, and Smike.

A very merry party they had been. Mrs. Nickleby, knowing of her son's obligations to the honest Yorkshireman, had, after some demur, yielded her consent to Mr. and Mrs. Browdie being invited out to tea; in the way of which arrangement there were, at first, sundry difficulties and obstacles, arising out of her not having had an opportunity of "calling" upon Mrs. Browdie first: for, although Mrs. Nickleby very often observed, with much complacency (as most punctilious people do), that she had not an atom of pride or formality about her, still she was a great stickler for dignity and ceremonies; and as it was manifest that, until a call had been made, she could not be (politely speaking, and according to the laws of society) even cognizant of the fact of Mrs. Browdie's existence, she felt her situation to be one of peculiar delicacy and difficulty.

"The call *must* originate with me, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, "that's indispensable. The fact is, my dear, that it's necessary there should be a sort of condescension on my part, and that I should show this young person that I am willing to take notice of her. There's a very respectable-looking young man," added Mrs. Nickleby after a short consideration, "who is conductor to one of the omnibuses that go by here, and who wears a glazed hat—your sister and I have noticed him very often—he has a wart upon his nose, Kate, you know, exactly like a gentleman's servant."

"Have all gentlemen's servants warts upon their noses, mother?" asked Nicholas.

"Nicholas, my dear, how very absurd you are!" returned his mother. "Of course I mean that his glazed hat looks like a gentleman's servant, and not the wart upon his nose—though even that is not so ridiculous as it may seem to you, for we had a footboy once, who had not only a wart, but a wen also, and a very large wen too, and he demanded to have his wages raised in consequence, because he found it came very expensive. Let me see, what was I—oh yes, I know. The best way that I can think of would be to send a card, and my compliments, (I've no doubt he'd take 'em for a pot of porter,) by this young man, to the Saracen with Two Necks—if the waiter took him for a gentleman's servant, so much the better. Then all Mrs. Browdie would have to do would be to send her card back by the carrier (he could easily come with a double knock), and there's an end of it."

"My dear mother," said Nicholas, "I don't suppose such unsophisticated people as these ever had a card of their own, or ever will have."

"Oh, that, indeed, Nicholas, my dear," returned Mrs. Nickleby, "that's another thing! If you put it upon that ground, why, of course, I have no more to say than that I have no doubt they are very good sort of persons, and that I have no kind of objection to their coming here to tea if they like, and shall make a point of being very civil to them if they do."

The point being thus effectually set at rest, and Mrs. Nickleby duly placed in the patronising and mildly-condescending position which became her rank and matrimonial years, Mr. and Mrs. Browdie were invited and came; and as they were very deferential to Mrs. Nickleby, and seemed to have a becoming appreciation of her greatness, and were very much pleased with everything, the good lady had more than once given Kate to understand, in a whisper, that she thought they were the very best-meaning people she had ever seen, and perfectly well behaved.

And thus it came to pass that John Browdie declared, in the parlour after supper, to wit, and twenty minutes before eleven o'clock P.M., that he had never been so happy in all his days.

Nor was Mrs. Browdie much behind her husband in this respect, for that young matron—whose rustic beauty contrasted very prettily with the more delicate loveliness of Kate, and without suffering by the contrast either, for each served as it were to set off and decorate the other—could not sufficiently admire the gentle and winning manners of the young lady, or the engaging affability of the elder one. Then Kate had the art of turning the conversation to subjects upon which the country girl, bashful at first in strange company, could feel herself at home; and if Mrs. Nickleby was not quite so felicitous at times in the selection of topics of discourse, or if she did seem, as Mrs. Browdie expressed it, "rather high in her notions," still nothing could be kinder, and that she took considerable interest in the young couple was manifest from the very long lectures on housewifery with which she was so obliging as to entertain Mrs. Browdie's private ear, which were illustrated

by various references to the domestic economy of the cottage, in which (those duties falling exclusively upon Kate) the good lady had about as much share, either in theory or practice, as any one of the statues of the Twelve Apostles which embellish the exterior of St. Paul's Cathedral.

"Mr. Browdie," said Kate, addressing his young wife, "is the best-humoured, the kindest and heartiest creature I ever saw. If I were oppressed with I don't know how many cares, it would make me happy only to look at him."

"He does seem indeed, upon my word, a most excellent creature, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby; "most excellent. And I am sure that at all times it will give me pleasure—really pleasure now—to have you, Mrs. Browdie, to see me in this plain and homely manner. We make no display," said Mrs. Nickleby with an air which seemed to insinuate that they could make a vast deal if they were so disposed—"no fuss, no preparation; I wouldn't allow it. I said, 'Kate, my dear, you will only make Mrs. Browdie feel uncomfortable, and how very foolish and inconsiderate that would be!'"

"I am very much obliged to you, I am sure, ma'am," returned Mrs. Browdie gratefully. "It's nearly eleven o'clock, John. I am afraid we are keeping you up very late, ma'am."

"Late!" cried Mrs. Nickleby with a sharp thin laugh, and one little cough at the end, like a note of admiration expressed. "This is quite early for us. We used to keep such hours! Twelve, one, two, three o'clock was nothing to us. Balls, dinners, card-parties—never were such rakes as the people about where we used to live. I often think now, I am sure, that how we ever could go through with it is quite astonishing—and that is just the evil of having a large connection and being a great deal sought after, which I would recommend all young married people steadily to resist; though of course, and it's perfectly clear, and a very happy thing too, *I* think, that very few young married people can be exposed to such temptations. There was one family in particular, that used to live about a mile from us—not straight down the road, but turning sharp off to the left by the turnpike where the Plymouth mail ran over the donkey—that were quite extraordinary people for giving the most extravagant parties, with artificial flowers and champagne, and variegated lamps, and, in short, every delicacy of eating and drinking that the most singular epicure could possibly require—I don't think that there ever were such people as those Peltiroguses. You remember the Peltiroguses, Kate?"

Kate saw that, for the ease and comfort of the visitors, it was high time to stay this flood of recollection, so answered that she entertained of the Peltiroguses a most vivid and distinct remembrance; and then said that Mr. Browdie had half promised, early in the evening, that he would sing a Yorkshire song, and that she was most impatient that he should redeem his promise, because she was sure it would afford her mamma more amusement and pleasure than it was possible to express.

Mrs. Nickleby confirming her daughter with the best possible grace—for there was patronage in that too, and a kind of implication that she had a discerning taste in such matters, and was something of a critic—John Browdie proceeded to consider the words of some north-country ditty, and to take his wife's recollection respecting the same. This done, he made divers ungainly movements in his chair, and, singling out one particular fly on the ceiling from the other flies there asleep, fixed his eyes upon him, and began to roar a meek sentiment (supposed to be uttered by a gentle swain fast pining away with love and despair) in a voice of thunder.

At the end of the first verse, as though some person without had waited until then to make himself audible, was heard a loud and violent knocking at the street-door—so loud and so violent, indeed, that the ladies started as by one accord, and John Browdie stopped.

"It must be some mistake," said Nicholas carelessly. "We know nobody who would come here at this hour."

Mrs. Nickleby surmised, however, that perhaps the counting-house was burnt down, or perhaps "the Mr. Cheerybles" had sent to take Nicholas into partnership (which certainly appeared highly probable at that time of night), or perhaps Mr. Linkinwater had run away with the property, or perhaps Miss La Creevy was taken ill, or perhaps——

But a hasty exclamation from Kate stopped her abruptly in her conjectures, and Ralph Nickleby walked into the room.

"Stay," said Ralph as Nicholas rose, and Kate, making her way towards him, threw herself upon his arm. "Before that boy says a word, hear me."

Nicholas bit his lip and shook his head in a threatening manner, but appeared for the moment unable to articulate a syllable. Kate clung closer to his arm, Smike retreated behind them, and John Browdie, who had heard of Ralph, and appeared to have no great difficulty in recognising him, stepped between the old man and his young friend, as if with the inten-

tion of preventing either of them from advancing a step further.

"Hear me, I say," said Ralph, "and not him."

"Say what thou'st gotten to say, then, sir," retorted John; "and tak' care thou dinnot put up angry bluid which thou'dst betther try to quiet."

"I should know *you*," said Ralph, "by your tongue; and *him*" (pointing to Smike) "by his looks."

"Don't speak to him," said Nicholas, recovering his voice. "I will not have it. I will not hear him. I do not know that man. I cannot breathe the air that he corrupts. His presence is an insult to my sister. It is shame to see him. I will not bear it, by——"

"Stand!" cried John, laying his heavy hand upon his chest.

"Then let him instantly retire," said Nicholas, struggling. "I am not going to lay hands upon him, but he shall withdraw. I will not have him here. John—John Browdie—is this my house—am I a child? If he stands there," cried Nicholas, burning with fury, "looking so calmly upon those who know his black and dastardly heart, he'll drive me mad."

To all these exclamations John Browdie answered not a word, but he retained his hold upon Nicholas; and, when he was silent again, spoke.

"There's more to say and hear than thou think'st for," said John. "I tell 'ee I ha' gotten scent o' thot already. Wa'at be that shadow ootside door there? Noo, schoolmeasther, show thyself, mun; dinnot be sheamefeaced. Noo, auld gen'l'man, let's have schoolmeasther, coom."

Hearing this adjuration, Mr. Squeers, who had been lingering in the passage until such time as it should be expedient for him to enter, and he could appear with effect, was fain to present himself in a somewhat undignified and sneaking way; at which John Browdie laughed with such keen and heartfelt delight, that even Kate, in all the pain, anxiety, and surprise of the scene, and though the tears were in her eyes, felt a disposition to join him.

"Have you done enjoying yourself, sir?" said Ralph at length.

"Pratty nigh for the prasant time, sir," replied John.

"I can wait," said Ralph. "Take your own time, pray."

Ralph waited until there was a perfect silence, and then turning to Mrs. Nickleby, but directing an eager glance at Kate, as if more anxious to watch his effect upon her, said:

"Now, ma'am, listen to me. I don't imagine that you were a party to a very fine tirade of words sent me by that boy of yours, because I don't believe that, under his control, you have the slightest will of your own, or that your advice, your opinion, your wants, your wishes—anything which in nature and reason (or of what use is your great experience?) ought to weigh with him—has the slightest influence or weight whatever, or is taken for a moment into account."

Mrs. Nickleby shook her head and sighed, as if there were a good deal in that, certainly.

"For this reason," resumed Ralph, "I address myself to you, ma'am. For this reason partly, and partly because I do not wish to be disgraced by the acts of a vicious stripling whom *I* was obliged to disown, and who afterwards, in his boyish majesty, feigns to—ha! ha!—to disown *me*, I present myself here to-night. I have another motive in coming—a motive of humanity. I come here," said Ralph, looking round with a biting and triumphant smile, and gloating and dwelling upon the words as if he were loath to lose the pleasure of saying them, "to restore a parent his child. Ay, sir," he continued, bending eagerly forward, and addressing Nicholas, as he marked the change of his countenance, "to restore a parent his child—his son, sir—trepanned, waylaid, and guarded at every turn by you, with the base design of robbing him some day of any little wretched pittance of which he might become possessed."

"In that you know you lie," said Nicholas proudly.

"In this I know I speak the truth—I have his father here," retorted Ralph.

"Here!" sneered Squeers, stepping forward. "Do you hear that? Here! Didn't I tell you to be careful that his father didn't turn up and send him back to me? Why, his father's my friend; he's to come back to me directly, he is. Now, what do you say—eh!—now—come—what do you say to that—an't you sorry you took so much trouble for nothing? an't you? an't you?"

"You bear upon your body certain marks I gave you," said Nicholas, looking quietly away, "and may talk in acknowledgment of them as much as you please. You'll talk a long time before you rub them out, Mr. Squeers."

The estimable gentleman last named cast a hasty look at the table, as if he were prompted by this retort to throw a jug or bottle at the head of Nicholas, but he was interrupted in this design (if such design he had) by Ralph, who, touching him on the elbow, bade him tell the father that he might now appear and claim his son.

This being purely a labour of love, Mr. Squeers readily complied, and, leaving the room for the purpose, almost immediately returned, supporting a sleek personage with an oily face, who, bursting from him, and giving to view the form and face of Mr. Snawley, made straight up to Smike, and, tucking that poor fellow's head under his arm in a most uncouth and awkward embrace, elevated his broad-brimmed hat at arm's length in the air as a token of devout thanksgiving, exclaiming, meanwhile, "How little did I think of this here joyful meeting, when I saw him last! Oh, how little did I think it!"

"Be composed, sir," said Ralph with a gruff expression of sympathy; "you have got him now."

"Got him! Oh, haven't I got him! Have I got him, though?" cried Mr. Snawley, scarcely able to believe it. "Yes, here he is, flesh and blood, flesh and blood."

"Vary little flesh," said John Browdie.

Mr. Snawley was too much occupied by his parental feelings to notice this remark: and, to assure himself more completely of the restoration of his child, tucked his head under his arm again, and kept it there.

"What was it," said Snawley, "that made me take such a strong interest in him when that worthy instructor of youth brought him to my house? What was it that made me burn all over with a wish to chastise him severely for cutting away from his best friends—his pastors and masters?"

"It was parental instinct, sir," observed Squeers.

"That's what it was, sir," rejoined Snawley: "the elevated feeling—the feeling of the ancient Romans and Grecians, and of the beasts of the field and birds of the air, with the exception of rabbits and tom-cats, which sometimes devour their offspring. My heart yearned towards him. I could have—I don't know what I couldn't have done to him in the anger of a father."

"It only shows what Natur' is, sir," said Mr. Squeers. "She's a rum 'un, is Natur'."

"She is a holy thing, sir," remarked Snawley.

"I believe you," added Mr. Squeers with a moral sigh. "I should like to know how we should ever get on without her. Natur'," said Mr. Squeers solemnly, "is more easier conceived than described. Oh, what a blessed thing, sir, to be in a state of natur'!"

Pending this philosophical discourse, the bystanders had been quite stupefied with amazement, while Nicholas had looked keenly from Snawley to Squeers, and from Squeers to Ralph, divided between his feelings of disgust, doubt, and surprise. At this juncture, Smike, escaping from his father, fled to Nicholas, and implored him, in most moving terms, never to give him up, but to let him live and die beside him.

"If you are this boy's father," said Nicholas, "look at the wreck he is, and tell me that you purpose to send him back to that loathsome den from which I brought him."

"Scandal again!" cried Squeers. "Recollect you an't worth powder and shot, but I'll be even with you one way or another."

"Stop," interposed Ralph as Snawley was about to speak. "Let us cut this matter short, and not bandy words here with hare-brained profligates. This is your son, as you can prove—and you, Mr. Squeers, you know this boy to be the same that was with you for so many years under the name of Smike—do you?"

"Do I!" returned Squeers. "Don't I?"

"Good," said Ralph; "a very few words will be sufficient here. You had a son by your first wife, Mr. Snawley?"

"I had," replied that person, "and there he stands."

"We'll show that presently," said Ralph. "You and your wife were separated, and she had the boy to live with her, when he was a year old. You received a communication from her, when you had lived apart a year or two, that the boy was dead; and you believed it?"

"Of course I did!" returned Snawley. "Oh, the joy of——"

"Be rational, sir, pray," said Ralph. "This is business, and transports interfere with it. This wife died a year and a half ago, or thereabouts—not more—in some obscure place, where she was housekeeper in a family. Is that the case?"

"That's the case," replied Snawley.

"Having written on her death-bed a letter or confession to you about this very boy, which, as it was not directed otherwise than in your name, only reached you, and that by a circuitous course, a few days since?"

"Just so," said Snawley. "Correct in every particular, sir."

"And this confession," resumed Ralph, "is to the effect that his death was an invention of hers to wound you—was a part of a system of annoyance, in short, which you seem to have adopted towards each other—that the boy lived, but was of weak and imperfect intellect—that she sent him by a trusty hand to a cheap school in Yorkshire—that she had paid for his education for some years, and then, being poor, and

going a long way off, gradually deserted him, for which she prayed forgiveness?"

Snawley nodded his head, and wiped his eyes; the first slightly, the last violently.

"The school was Mr. Squeers's," continued Ralph; "the boy was left there in the name of Smike; every description was fully given, dates tally exactly with Mr. Squeers's books, Mr. Squeers is lodging with you at this time; you have two other boys at his school; you communicated the whole discovery to him, he brought you to me as the person who had recommended to him the kidnapper of his child; and I brought you here. Is that so?"

"You talk like a good book, sir, that's got nothing in its inside but what's the truth," replied Snawley.

"This is your pocket-book," said Ralph, producing one from his coat; "the certificates of your first marriage and of the boy's birth, and your wife's two letters, and every other paper that can support these statements, directly or by implication, are here, are they?"

"Every one of 'em, sir."

"And you don't object to their being looked at here, so that these people may be convinced of your power to substantiate your claim at once in law and reason, and you may resume your control over your own son without more delay. Do I understand you?"

"I couldn't have understood myself better, sir."

"There, then," said Ralph, tossing the pocket-book upon the table. "Let them see them if they like; and, as those are the original papers, I should recommend you to stand near while they are being examined, or you may chance to lose some."

With these words Ralph sat down unbidden, and compressing his lips, which were for the moment slightly parted by a smile, folded his arms, and looked for the first time at his nephew.

Nicholas, stung by the concluding taunt, darted an indignant glance at him; but, commanding himself as well as he could, entered upon a close examination of the documents, at which John Browdie assisted. There was nothing about them which could be called in question. The certificates were regularly signed as extracts from the parish books, the first letter had a genuine appearance of having been written and preserved for some years, the handwriting of the second tallied with it exactly, (making proper allowance for its having been written by a person in extremity,) and there were several other corroboratory scraps of entries and memoranda which it was equally difficult to question.

"Dear Nicholas," whispered Kate, who had been looking anxiously over his shoulder, "can this be really the case? Is this statement true?"

"I fear it is," answered Nicholas. "What say you, John?"

John scratched his head and shook it, but said nothing at all.

"You will observe, ma'am," said Ralph, addressing himself to Mrs. Nickleby, "that this boy being a minor, and not of strong mind, we might have come here to-night, armed with the powers of the law, and backed by a troop of its myrmidons. I should have done so, ma'am, unquestionably, but for my regard for the feelings of yourself—and your daughter."

"You have shown your regard for *her* feelings well," said Nicholas, drawing his sister towards him.

"Thank you," replied Ralph. "Your praise, sir, is commendation indeed."

"Well," said Squeers, "what's to be done? Them hackney-coach horses will catch cold if we don't think of moving; there's one of 'em a sneezing now, so that he blows the street-door right open. What's the order of the day—eh? Is Master Snawley to come along with us?"

"No, no, no," replied Smike, drawing back, and clinging to Nicholas. "No. Pray, no. I will not go from you with him. No, no."

"This is a cruel thing," said Snawley, looking to his friends for support. "Do parents bring children into the world for this?"

"Do parents bring children into the world for *thot?*" said John Browdie bluntly, pointing, as he spoke, to Squeers.

"Never you mind," retorted that gentleman, tapping his nose derisively.

"Never I mind!" said John; "no, nor never nobody mind, say'st thou, schoolmeasther. It's nobody's minding that keeps sike men as thou afloat. Noo then, where be'est thou comin' to? Dang it, dinnot coom treadin' ower me, mun!"

Suiting the action to the word, John Browdie just jerked his elbow into the chest of Mr. Squeers, who was advancing upon Smike; with so much dexterity, that the schoolmaster reeled and staggered back upon Ralph Nickleby, and, being unable to recover his balance, knocked that gentleman off his chair, and stumbled heavily upon him.

This accidental circumstance was the signal for some very decisive proceedings. In the midst of a great noise, occasioned by the prayers and entreaties of Smike, the cries and exclamations of the women, and the vehemence of the men, demonstrations were made of carrying off

the lost son by violence: and Squeers had actually begun to haul him out, when Nicholas (who, until then, had been evidently undecided how to act) took him by the collar, and, shaking him so that such teeth as he had chattered in his head, politely escorted him to the room-door, and thrusting him into the passage, shut it upon him.

"Now," said Nicholas to the other two, "have the goodness to follow your friend."

"I want my son," said Snawley.

"Your son," replied Nicholas, "chooses for himself. He chooses to remain here, and he shall."

"You won't give him up?" said Snawley.

"I would not give him up against his will, to be the victim of such brutality as that to which you would consign him," replied Nicholas, "if he were a dog or a rat."

"Knock that Nickleby down with a candlestick," cried Mr. Squeers through the keyhole, "and bring out my hat, somebody, will you, unless he wants to steal it."

"I am very sorry indeed," said Mrs. Nickleby, who, with Mrs. Browdie, had stood crying and biting her fingers in a corner, while Kate—very pale, but perfectly quiet—had kept as near her brother as she could. "I am very sorry indeed for all this. I really don't know what would be best to do, and that's the truth. Nicholas ought to be the best judge, and I hope he is. Of course, it's a hard thing to have to keep other people's children, though young Mr. Snawley is certainly as useful and willing as it's possible for anybody to be; but, if it could be settled in any friendly manner—if old Mr. Snawley, for instance, would settle to pay something certain for his board and lodging, and some fair arrangement was come to, so that we undertook to have fish twice a week, and a pudding twice, or a dumpling, or something of that sort, I do think that it might be very satisfactory and pleasant for all parties."

This compromise, which was proposed with abundance of tears and sighs, not exactly meeting the point at issue, nobody took any notice of it; and poor Mrs. Nickleby accordingly proceeded to enlighten Mrs. Browdie upon the advantages of such a scheme, and the unhappy results flowing, on all occasions, from her not being attended to when she proffered her advice.

"You, sir," said Snawley, addressing the terrified Smike, "are an unnatural, ungrateful, unlovable boy. You won't let me love you when I want to. Won't you come home—won't you?"

"No, no, no!" cried Smike, shrinking back.

"He never loved nobody," bawled Squeers through the keyhole. "He never loved me; he never loved Wackford, who is next door but one to a cherubim. How can you expect that he'll love his father? He'll never love his father, he won't. He don't know what it is to have a father. He don't understand it. It an't in him."

Mr. Snawley looked steadfastly at his son for a full minute, and then, covering his eyes with his hand, and once more raising his hat in the air, appeared deeply occupied in deploring his black ingratitude. Then, drawing his arm across his eyes, he picked up Mr. Squeers's hat, and taking it under one arm, and his own under the other, walked slowly and sadly out.

"Your romance, sir," said Ralph, lingering for a moment. "is destroyed, I take it. No unknown; no persecuted descendant of a man of high degree; but the weak, imbecile son of a poor, petty tradesman. We shall see how your sympathy melts before plain matter of fact."

"You shall," said Nicholas, motioning towards the door.

"And trust me, sir," added Ralph, "that I never supposed you would give him up to-night. Pride, obstinacy, reputation for fine feeling, were all against it. These must be brought down, sir, lowered, crushed, as they shall be soon. The protracted and wearing anxiety and expense of the law in its most oppressive form, its torture from hour to hour, its weary days and sleepless nights—with these I'll prove you, and break your haughty spirit, strong as you deem it now. And when you make this house a hell, and visit these trials upon yonder wretched object (as you will; I know you), and those who think you now a young-fledged hero, we'll go into old accounts between us two, and see who stands the debtor, and comes out best at last—even before the world."

Ralph Nickleby withdrew. But Mr. Squeers, who had heard a portion of this closing address, and was by this time wound up to a pitch of impotent malignity almost unprecedented, could not refrain from returning to the parlour door, and actually cutting some dozen capers with various wry faces and hideous grimaces, expressive of his triumphant confidence in the downfall and defeat of Nicholas.

Having concluded this war-dance, in which his short trousers and large boots had borne a very conspicuous figure, Mr. Squeers followed his friends, and the family were left to meditate upon recent occurrences.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THROWS SOME LIGHT UPON NICHOLAS'S LOVE; BUT WHETHER FOR GOOD OR EVIL THE READER MUST DETERMINE.

AFTER an anxious consideration of the painful and embarrassing position in which he was placed, Nicholas decided that he ought to lose no time in frankly stating it to the kind brothers. Availing himself of the first opportunity of being alone with Mr. Charles Cheeryble at the close of next day, he accordingly related Smike's little history, and modestly but firmly expressed his hope that the good old gentleman would, under such circumstances as he described, hold him justified in adopting the extreme course of interfering between parent and child, and upholding the latter in his disobedience; even though his horror and dread of his father might seem, and would doubtless be represented as, a thing so repulsive and unnatural as to render those who countenanced him in it fit objects of general detestation and abhorrence.

"So deeply rooted does this horror of the man appear to be," said Nicholas, "that I can hardly believe he really is his son. Nature does

MR. SQUEERS EXECUTES AN IMPROMPTU PAS SEUL.

not seem to have implanted in his breast one lingering feeling of affection for him, and surely she can never err."

"My dear sir," replied brother Charles, "you fall into the very common mistake of charging upon Nature matters with which she has not the smallest connection, and for which she is in no way responsible. Men talk of Nature as an abstract thing, and lose sight of what is natural while they do so. Here is a poor lad who has never felt a parent's care, who has scarcely known anything all his life but suffering and sorrow, presented to a man who he is told is his father, and whose first act is to signify his intention of putting an end to his short term of happiness: of consigning him to his old fate, and taking him from the only friend he has ever had—which is yourself. If Nature, in such a case, put into that lad's breast but one secret prompting which urged him towards his father, and away from you, she would be a liar and an idiot."

Nicholas was delighted to find that the old gentleman spoke so warmly, and, in the hope that he might say something more to the same purpose, made no reply.

"The same mistake presents itself to me, in one shape or other, at every turn," said brother Charles. "Parents who never showed their love, complain of want of natural affection in their children—children who never showed their duty, complain of want of natural feeling in their parents—law-makers who find both so miserable that their affections have never had enough of life's sun to develop them, are loud in their moralisings over parents and children too, and cry that the very ties of Nature are disregarded. Natural affections and instincts, my dear sir, are the most beautiful of the Almighty's works, but, like other beautiful works of His, they must be reared and fostered, or it is as natural that they should be wholly obscured, and that new feelings should usurp their place, as it is that the sweetest productions of the earth, left untended, should be choked with weeds and briers. I wish we could be brought to consider this, and, remembering natural obligations a little more at the right time, talk about them a little less at the wrong one."

After this, brother Charles, who had talked himself into a great heat, stopped to cool a little, and then continued:

"I dare say you are surprised, my dear sir, that I have listened to your recital with so little astonishment. That is easily explained—your uncle has been here this morning."

Nicholas coloured, and drew back a step or two.

"Yes," said the old gentleman, tapping his desk emphatically, "here—in this room. He would listen neither to reason, feeling, nor justice. But brother Ned was hard upon him—brother Ned, sir, might have melted a paving-stone."

"He came to——" said Nicholas.

"To complain of you," returned brother Charles, "to poison our ears with calumnies and falsehoods; but he came on a fruitless errand, and went away with some wholesome truths in his ear besides. Brother Ned, my dear Mr. Nickleby—brother Ned, sir, is a perfect lion. So is Tim Linkinwater—Tim is quite a lion. We had Tim in to face him at first, and Tim was at him, sir, before you could say 'Jack Robinson.'"

"How can I ever thank you for all the deep obligations you impose upon me every day?" said Nicholas.

"By keeping silence upon the subject, my dear sir," returned brother Charles. "You shall be righted. At least, you shall not be wronged. Nobody belonging to you shall be wronged. They shall not hurt a hair of your head, or the boy's head, or your mother's head, or your sister's head. I have said it, brother Ned has said it, Tim Linkinwater has said it. We have all said it, and we'll all do it. I have seen the father—if he is the father—and I suppose he must be. He is a barbarian and a hypocrite, Mr. Nickleby. I told him, 'You are a barbarian, sir.' I did. I said, 'You're a barbarian, sir.' And I'm glad of it—I am *very* glad I told him he was a barbarian—very glad indeed!"

By this time brother Charles was in such a very warm state of indignation, that Nicholas thought he might venture to put in a word, but, the moment he essayed to do so, Mr. Cheeryble laid his hand softly upon his arm, and pointed to a chair.

"The subject is at an end for the present," said the old gentleman, wiping his face. "Don't revive it by a single word. I am going to speak upon another subject—a confidential subject, Mr. Nickleby. We must be cool again, we must be cool."

After two or three turns across the room he resumed his seat, and, drawing his chair nearer to that on which Nicholas was seated, said:

"I am about to employ you, my dear sir, on a confidential and delicate mission."

"You might employ many a more able messenger, sir," said Nicholas, "but a more trustworthy or zealous one, I may be bold to say, you could not find."

"Of that I am well assured," returned brother Charles, "well assured. You will give me credit for thinking so, when I tell you that the object of this mission is a young lady."

"A young lady, sir!" cried Nicholas, quite trembling for the moment with his eagerness to hear more.

"A very beautiful young lady," said Mr. Cheeryble gravely.

"Pray go on, sir," returned Nicholas.

"I am thinking how to do so," said brother Charles—sadly, as it seemed to his young friend, and with an expression allied to pain. "You accidentally saw a young lady in this room one morning, my dear sir, in a fainting fit. Do you remember? Perhaps you have forgotten——"

"Oh no!" replied Nicholas hurriedly. "I—I—remember it very well indeed."

"*She* is the lady I speak of," said brother Charles. Like the famous parrot, Nicholas thought a great deal, but was unable to utter a word.

"She is the daughter," said Mr. Cheeryble, "of a lady who, when she was a beautiful girl herself, and I was very many years younger, I—it seems a strange word for me to utter now—I loved very dearly. You will smile, perhaps, to hear a grey-headed man talk about such things: you will not offend me, for, when I was as young as you, I dare say I should have done the same."

"I have no such inclination, indeed," said Nicholas.

"My dear brother Ned," continued Mr. Cheeryble, "was to have married her sister, but she died. She is dead too now, and has been for many years. She married—her choice; and I wish I could add that her after life was as happy as God knows I ever prayed it might be!"

A short silence intervened, which Nicholas made no effort to break.

"If trial and calamity had fallen as lightly on his head as, in the deepest truth of my own heart, I ever hoped (for her sake) it would, his life would have been one of peace and happiness," said the old gentleman calmly. "It will be enough to say that this was not the case—that she was not happy—that they fell into complicated distresses and difficulties—that she came, twelve months before her death, to appeal to my old friendship; sadly changed, sadly altered, broken-spirited from suffering and ill-usage, and almost broken-hearted. He readily availed himself of the money which, to give her but one hour's peace of mind, I would have poured out as freely as water—nay, he often sent her back for more—and yet, even while he squandered it, he made the very success of these her applications to me the groundwork of cruel taunts and jeers, protesting that he knew she thought with bitter remorse of the choice she had made, that she had married him from motives of interest and vanity (he was a gay young man, with great friends about him, when she chose him for her husband), and venting, in short, upon her, by every unjust and unkind means, the bitterness of that ruin and disappointment which had been brought about by his profligacy alone. In those times this young lady was a mere child. I never saw her again until that morning when you saw her also, but my nephew, Frank——"

Nicholas started, and, indistinctly apologising for the interruption, begged his patron to proceed.

"My nephew, Frank, I say," resumed Mr. Cheeryble, "encountered her by accident, and lost sight of her almost in a minute afterwards, within two days after he returned to England. Her father lay in some secret place to avoid his creditors, reduced, between sickness and poverty, to the verge of death, and she, a child—we might almost think, if we did not know the wisdom of all Heaven's decrees—who should have blessed a better man, was steadily braving privation, degradation, and everything most terrible to such a young and delicate creature's heart, for the purpose of supporting him. She was attended, sir," said brother Charles, "in these reverses, by one faithful creature, who had been, in old times, a poor kitchen wench in the family, who was then their solitary servant, but who might have been, for the truth and fidelity of her heart—who might have been—ah! the wife of Tim Linkinwater himself, sir!"

Pursuing this encomium upon the poor follower with such energy and relish as no words can describe, brother Charles leant back in his chair, and delivered the remainder of his relation with greater composure.

It was in substance this:—That proudly resisting all offers of permanent aid and support from her late mother's friends, because they were made conditional upon her quitting the wretched man, her father, who had no friends left, and shrinking with instinctive delicacy from appealing in their behalf to that true and noble heart which he hated, and had, through its greatest and purest goodness, deeply wronged by misconstruction and ill report, this young girl had struggled alone and unassisted to maintain him by the labour of her hands. That through the utmost depths of poverty and affliction she had toiled, never turning aside for an instant from her task, never wearied by the petulant gloom of a sick man sustained by no consoling recollections of the past, or hopes of the future; never repining for the comforts she had rejected, or bewailing the hard lot she had voluntarily incurred. That every little accomplishment she had acquired in happier days had been put into requisition for this purpose, and directed to this one end. That for two long years, toiling by day, and often too by night, working at the needle, the pencil, and the pen, and submitting, as a daily governess, to such caprices and indignities as women (with daughters too) too often love to inflict upon their own sex when they serve in such capacities, as though in jealousy of the superior intelligence which they are necessitated to employ, indignities, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, heaped upon persons immeasurably and incalculably their betters, but outweighing in comparison any that the most heartless blackleg would put upon his groom—that for two long years, by dint of labouring in all these capacities, and weary-

ing in none, she had not succeeded in the sole aim and object of her life, but that, overwhelmed by accumulated difficulties and disappointments, she had been compelled to seek out her mother's old friend, and, with a bursting heart, to confide in him at last.

"If I had been poor," said brother Charles with sparkling eyes; "if I had been poor, Mr. Nickleby, my dear sir, which thank God I am not, I would have denied myself—of course anybody would under such circumstances—the commonest necessaries of life to help her. As it is, the task is a difficult one. If her father were dead, nothing could be easier, for then she should share and cheer the happiest home that brother Ned and I could have, as if she were our child or sister. But he is still alive. Nobody can help him—that has been tried a thousand times; he was not abandoned by all without good cause, I know."

"Cannot she be persuaded to——" Nicholas hesitated when he had got thus far.

"To leave him?" said brother Charles. "Who could entreat a child to desert her parent? Such entreaties, limited to her seeing him occasionally, have been urged upon her—not by me—but always with the same result."

"Is he kind to her?" said Nicholas. "Does he requite her affection?"

"True kindness, considerate, self-denying kindness, is not in his nature," returned Mr. Cheeryble. "Such kindness as he knows, he regards her with, I believe. The mother was a gentle, loving, confiding creature, and, although he wounded her from their marriage till her death as cruelly and wantonly as ever man did, she never ceased to love him. She commended him on her death-bed to her child's care. Her child has never forgotten it, and never will."

"Have you no influence over him?" asked Nicholas.

"I, my dear sir! The last man in the world. Such are his jealousy and hatred of me, that if he knew his daughter had opened her heart to me, he would render her life miserable with his reproaches; although—this is the inconsistency and selfishness of his character—although, if he knew that every penny she had came from me, he would not relinquish one personal desire that the most reckless expenditure of her scanty stock could gratify."

"An unnatural scoundrel!" said Nicholas indignantly.

"We will use no harsh terms," said brother Charles in a gentle voice; "but accommodate ourselves to the circumstances in which this young lady is placed. Such assistance as I have prevailed upon her to accept, I have been obliged, at her own earnest request, to dole out in the smallest portions, lest he, finding how easily money was procured, should squander it even more lightly than he is accustomed to do. She has come to and fro, to and fro, secretly and by night, to take even this; and I cannot bear that things should go on in this way, Mr. Nickleby—I really cannot bear it."

Then it came out, by little and little, how that the twins had been revolving in their good old heads manifold plans and schemes for helping this young lady in the most delicate and considerate way, and so that her father should not suspect the source whence the aid was derived; and how they had at last come to the conclusion that the best course would be to make a feint of purchasing her little drawings and ornamental work at a high price, and keeping up a constant demand for the same. For the furtherance of which end and object it was necessary that somebody should represent the dealer in such commodities, and, after great deliberation, they had pitched upon Nicholas to support this character.

"He knows me," said brother Charles, "and he knows my brother Ned. Neither of us would do. Frank is a very good fellow—a very fine fellow—but we are afraid that he might be a little flighty and thoughtless in such a delicate matter, and that he might, perhaps—that he might, in short, be too susceptible (for she is a beautiful creature, sir; just what her poor mother was), and, falling in love with her before he well knew his own mind, carry pain and sorrow into that innocent breast, which we would be the humble instruments of gradually making happy. He took an extraordinary interest in her fortunes when he first happened to encounter her, and we gather, from the inquiries we have made of him, that it was she in whose behalf he made that turmoil which led to your first acquaintance."

Nicholas stammered out that he had before suspected the possibility of such a thing; and, in explanation of its having occurred to him, described when and where he had seen the young lady himself.

"Well; then you see," continued brother Charles, "that *he* wouldn't do. Tim Linkinwater is out of the question; for Tim, sir, is such a tremendous fellow, that he could never contain himself, but would go to loggerheads with the father before he had been in the place five minutes. You don't know what Tim is, sir, when he is aroused by anything that appeals to his feelings very strongly—then he is terrific,

sir, is Tim Linkinwater — absolutely terrific. Now, in you we can repose the strictest confidence; in you we have seen—or at least *I* have seen, and that's the same thing, for there's no difference between me and my brother Ned, except that he is the finest creature that ever lived, and that there is not, and never will be, anybody like him in all the world—in you we have seen domestic virtues and affections, and delicacy of feeling, which exactly qualify you for such an office. And you are the man, sir."

"The young lady, sir," said Nicholas, who felt so embarrassed that he had no small difficulty in saying anything at all—"does—is—is she a party to this innocent deceit?"

"Yes, yes," returned Mr. Cheeryble; "at least, she knows you come from us; she does *not* know, however, but that we shall dispose of these little productions that you'll purchase from time to time; and, perhaps, if you did it very well (that is, *very* well indeed), perhaps she might be brought to believe that we—that we made a profit of them. Eh? Eh?"

In this guileless and most kind simplicity, brother Charles was so happy, and in this possibility of the young lady being led to think that she was under no obligation to him, he evidently felt so sanguine, and had so much delight, that Nicholas would not breathe a doubt upon the subject.

All this time, however, there hovered upon the tip of his tongue a confession that the very same objections which Mr. Cheeryble had stated to the employment of his nephew in this commission applied with at least equal force and validity to himself, and a hundred times had he been upon the point of avowing the real state of his feelings, and entreating to be released from it. But as often, treading upon the heels of this impulse, came another which urged him to refrain, and to keep his secret to his own breast. "Why should I," thought Nicholas, "why should I throw difficulties in the way of this benevolent and high-minded design? What if I do love and reverence this good and lovely creature—should I not appear a most arrogant and shallow coxcomb if I gravely represented that there was any danger of her falling in love with me? Besides, have I no confidence in myself? Am I not now bound in honour to repress these thoughts? Has not this excellent man a right to my best and heartiest services, and should any considerations of self deter me from rendering them?"

Asking himself such questions as these, Nicholas mentally answered with great emphasis "No!" and, persuading himself that he was a most conscientious and glorious martyr, nobly resolved to do what, if he had examined his own heart a little more carefully, he would have found he could not resist. Such is the sleight of hand by which we juggle with ourselves, and change our very weaknesses into staunch and most magnanimous virtues!

Mr. Cheeryble, being, of course, wholly unsuspicious that such reflections were presenting themselves to his young friend, proceeded to give him the needful credentials and directions for his first visit, which was to be made next morning; and all preliminaries being arranged, and the strictest secrecy enjoined, Nicholas walked home for the night very thoughtfully indeed.

The place to which Mr. Cheeryble had directed him was a row of mean and not over-cleanly houses, situated within "the Rules" of the King's Bench Prison, and not many hundred paces distant from the obelisk in St. George's Fields. The Rules are a certain liberty adjoining the prison, and comprising some dozen streets in which debtors who can raise money to pay large fees, from which their creditors do *not* derive any benefit, are permitted to reside by the wise provisions of the same enlightened laws which leave the debtor who can raise no money to starve in gaol, without the food, clothing, lodging, or warmth which are provided for felons convicted of the most atrocious crimes that can disgrace humanity. There are many pleasant fictions of the law in constant operation, but there is not one so pleasant or practically humorous as that which supposes every man to be of equal value in its impartial eye, and the benefits of all laws to be equally attainable by all men, without the smallest reference to the furniture of their pockets.

To the row of houses indicated to him by Mr. Charles Cheeryble, Nicholas directed his steps, without much troubling his head with such matters as these; and at this row of houses —after traversing a very dirty and dusty suburb, of which minor theatricals, shell-fish, ginger-beer, spring vans, greengrocery, and brokers' shops appeared to compose the main and most prominent features—he at length arrived with a palpitating heart. There were small gardens in front, which, being wholly neglected in all other respects, served as little pens for the dust to collect in, until the wind came round the corner and blew it down the road. Opening the rickety gate which, dangling on its broken hinges before one of these, half admitted and half repulsed the visitor, Nicholas knocked at the street-door with a faltering hand.

It was, in truth, a shabby house outside, with very dim parlour windows and very small show of blinds, and very dirty muslin curtains dangling across the lower panes on very loose and limp strings. Neither, when the door was opened, did the inside appear to belie the outward promise, as there was faded carpeting on the stairs, and faded oil-cloth in the passage; in addition to which discomforts a gentleman Ruler was smoking hard in the front parlour (though it was not yet noon), while the lady of the house was busily engaged in turpentining the disjointed fragments of a tent bedstead at the door of the back-parlour, as if in preparation for the reception of some new lodger who had been fortunate enough to engage it.

Nicholas had ample time to make these observations while the little boy, who went on errands for the lodgers, clattered down the kitchen stairs, and was heard to scream, as in some remote cellar, for Miss Bray's servant, who, presently appearing and requesting him to follow her, caused him to evince greater symptoms of nervousness and disorder than so natural a consequence of his having inquired for that young lady would seem calculated to occasion.

Up-stairs he went, however, and into a front room he was shown, and there, seated at a little table by the window, on which were drawing materials with which she was occupied, sat the beautiful girl who had so engrossed his thoughts, and who, surrounded by all the new and strong interest which Nicholas attached to her story, seemed now, in his eyes, a thousand times more beautiful than he had ever yet supposed her.

But how the graces and elegancies which she had dispersed about the poorly-furnished room went to the heart of Nicholas! Flowers, plants, birds, the harp, the old piano whose notes had sounded so much sweeter in bygone times—how many struggles had it cost her to keep these two last links of that broken chain which bound her yet to home! With every slender ornament, the occupation of her leisure hours, replete with that graceful charm which lingers in every little tasteful work of woman's hands, how much patient endurance and how many gentle affections were entwined! He felt as though the smile of Heaven were on the little chamber; as though the beautiful devotion of so young and weak a creature had shed a ray of its own on the inanimate things around, and made them beautiful as itself; as though the halo with which old painters surround the bright angels of a sinless world played about a being akin in spirit to them, and its light were visibly before him.

And yet Nicholas was in the Rules of the King's Bench Prison! If he had been in Italy indeed, and the time had been sunset, and the scene a stately terrace! But, there is one broad sky over all the world, and whether it be blue or cloudy, the same heaven beyond it; so, perhaps, he had no need of compunction for thinking as he did.

It is not to be supposed that he took in everything at one glance, for he had as yet been unconscious of the presence of a sick man propped up with pillows in an easy-chair, who, moving restlessly and impatiently in his seat, attracted his attention.

He was scarce fifty, perhaps, but so emaciated as to appear much older. His features presented the remains of a handsome countenance, but one in which the embers of strong and impetuous passions were easier to be traced than any expression which would have rendered a far plainer face much more prepossessing. His looks were very haggard, and his limbs and body literally worn to the bone, but there was something of the old fire in the large sunken eye notwithstanding, and it seemed to kindle afresh as he struck a thick stick, with which he seemed to have supported himself in his seat, impatiently on the floor twice or thrice, and called his daughter by her name.

"Madeline, who is this—what does anybody want here—who told a stranger we could be seen? What is it?"

"I believe——" the young lady began, as she inclined her head with an air of some confusion, in reply to the salutation of Nicholas.

"You always believe," returned her father petulantly. "What is it?"

By this time Nicholas had recovered sufficient presence of mind to speak for himself, so he said (as it had been agreed he should say) that he had called about a pair of hand-screens, and some painted velvet for an ottoman, both of which were required to be of the most elegant design possible, neither time nor expense being of the smallest consideration. He had also to pay for the two drawings, with many thanks, and, advancing to the little table, he laid upon it a bank note, folded in an envelope and sealed.

"See that the money is right, Madeline," said the father. "Open the paper, my dear."

"It's quite right, papa, I'm sure."

"Here!" said Mr. Bray, putting out his hand, and opening and shutting his bony fingers with irritable impatience. "Let me see. What are you talking about, Madeline—you're sure—how can you be sure of any such thing—five pounds—well, is *that* right?"

"Quite," said Madeline, bending over him. She was so busily employed in arranging the pillows that Nicholas could not see her face, but, as she stooped, he thought he saw a tear fall.

"Ring the bell, ring the bell," said the sick man with the same nervous eagerness, and motioning towards it with such a quivering hand that the bank note rustled in the air. "Tell her to get it changed—to get me a newspaper—to buy me some grapes—another bottle of the wine that I had last week—and—and—I forget half I want just now, but she can go out again. Let her get those first—those first. Now, Madeline, my love, quick, quick! Good God, how slow you are!"

"He remembers nothing that *she* wants!" thought Nicholas. Perhaps something of what he thought was expressed in his countenance, for the sick man, turning towards him with great asperity, demanded to know if he waited for a receipt.

"It is no matter at all," said Nicholas.

"No matter! What do you mean, sir?" was the tart rejoinder. "No matter! Do you think you bring your paltry money here as a favour or a gift; or as a matter of business, and in return for value received? D—n you, sir, because you can't appreciate the time and taste which are bestowed upon the goods you deal in, do you think you give your money away? Do you know that you are talking to a gentleman, sir, who at one time could have bought up fifty such men as you and all you have? What do you mean?"

"I merely mean that, as I shall have many dealings with this lady, if she will kindly allow me, I will not trouble her with such forms," said Nicholas.

"Then *I* mean, if you please, that we'll have as many forms as we can," returned the father. "My daughter, sir, requires no kindness from you or anybody else. Have the goodness to confine your dealings strictly to trade and business, and not to travel beyond it. Every petty tradesman is to begin to pity her now, is he? Upon my soul! Very pretty! Madeline, my dear, give him a receipt; and mind you always do so."

While she was feigning to write it, and Nicholas was ruminating upon the extraordinary, but by no means uncommon, character thus presented to his observation, the invalid, who appeared at times to suffer great bodily pain, sank back in his chair, and moaned out a feeble complaint that the girl had been gone an hour, and that everybody conspired to goad him.

"When," said Nicholas as he took the piece of paper, "when shall I—call again?"

This was addressed to the daughter, but the father answered immediately:

"When you're requested to call, sir, and not before. Don't worry and persecute. Madeline, my dear, when is this person to call again?"

"Oh! not for a long time—not for three or four weeks—it is not necessary, indeed—I can do without," said the young lady with great eagerness.

"Why, how are we to do without?" urged her father, not speaking above his breath. "Three or four weeks, Madeline! Three or four weeks!"

"Then sooner—sooner, if you please," said the young lady, turning to Nicholas.

"Three or four weeks!" muttered the father. "Madeline, what on earth—do nothing for three or four weeks!"

"It is a long time, ma'am," said Nicholas.

"*You* think so, do you?" retorted the father angrily. "If I chose to beg, sir, and stoop to ask assistance from people I despise, three or four months would not be a long time—three or four years would not be a long time. Understand, sir, that is if I chose to be dependent; but, as I don't, you may call in a week."

Nicholas bowed low to the young lady and retired, pondering upon Mr. Bray's ideas of independence, and devoutly hoping that there might be few such independent spirits as he mingling with the baser clay of humanity.

He heard a light footstep above him as he descended the stairs, and, looking round, saw that the young lady was standing there, and glancing timidly towards him, seemed to hesitate whether she should call him back or no. The best way of settling the question was to turn back at once, which Nicholas did.

"I don't know whether I do right in asking you, sir," said Madeline hurriedly, "but pray—pray—do not mention to my poor mother's dear friends what has passed here to-day. He has suffered much, and is worse this morning. I beg you, sir, as a boon, a favour to myself."

"You have but to hint a wish," returned Nicholas fervently, "and I would hazard my life to gratify it."

"You speak hastily, sir."

"Truly and sincerely," rejoined Nicholas, his lips trembling as he formed the words, "if ever man spoke truly yet. I am not skilled in disguising my feelings, and, if I were, I could not hide my heart from you. Dear madam, as I know your history, and feel as men and angels must who hear and see such things, I do entreat you to believe that I would die to serve you."

The young lady turned away her head and was plainly weeping.

"Forgive me," said Nicholas with respectful earnestness, "if I seem to say too much, or to presume upon the confidence which has been intrusted to me. But I could not leave you as if my interest and sympathy expired with the commission of the day. I am your faithful servant, humbly devoted to you from this hour—devoted in strict truth and honour to him who sent me here, and in pure integrity of heart and distant respect for you. If I meant more or less than this, I should be unworthy his regard, and false to the very nature that prompts the honest words I utter."

She waved her hand, entreating him to be gone, but answered not a word. Nicholas could say no more, and silently withdrew. And thus ended his first interview with Madeline Bray.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MR. RALPH NICKLEBY HAS SOME CONFIDENTIAL INTERCOURSE WITH ANOTHER OLD FRIEND. THEY CONCERT BETWEEN THEM A PROJECT WHICH PROMISES WELL FOR BOTH.

"THERE go the three-quarters past!" muttered Newman Noggs, listening to the chimes of some neighbouring church, "and my dinner-time's two. He does it on purpose. He makes a point of it. It's just like him."

It was in his own little den of an office, and on the top of his official stool, that Newman thus soliloquised; and the soliloquy referred, as Newman's grumbling soliloquies usually did, to Ralph Nickleby.

"I don't believe he ever had an appetite," said Newman, "except for pounds, shillings, and pence, and with them he's as greedy as a wolf. I should like to have him compelled to swallow one of every English coin. The penny would be an awkward morsel—but the crown—ha! ha!"

His good-humour being in some degree restored by the vision of Ralph Nickleby swallowing, perforce, a five-shilling piece, Newman slowly brought forth from his desk one of those portable bottles, currently known as pocket pistols, and, shaking the same close to his ear so as to produce a rippling sound very cool and pleasant to listen to, suffered his features to relax, and took a gurgling drink, which relaxed them still more. Replacing the cork, he smacked his lips twice or thrice with an air of great relish, and, the taste of the liquor having by this time evaporated, recurred to his grievances again.

"Five minutes to three," growled Newman; "it can't want more by this time; and I had my breakfast at eight o'clock, and *such* a breakfast! and my right dinner-time two! And I might have a nice little bit of hot roast meat spoiling at home all this time—how does *he* know I haven't? 'Don't go till I come back,' 'Don't go till I come back,' day after day. What do you always go out at my dinner-time for, then—eh? Don't you know it's nothing but aggravation—eh?"

These words, though uttered in a very loud key, were addressed to nothing but empty air. The recital of his wrongs, however, seemed to have the effect of making Newman Noggs desperate; for he flattened his old hat upon his head, and, drawing on the everlasting gloves, declared with great vehemence that, come what might, he would go to dinner that very minute.

Carrying this resolution into instant effect, he had advanced as far as the passage, when the sound of the latch-key in the street-door caused him to make a precipitate retreat into his own office again.

"Here he is," growled Newman, "and somebody with him. Now it'll be 'Stop till this gentleman's gone.' But I won't—that's flat."

So saying, Newman slipped into a tall empty closet which opened with two half-doors, and shut himself up; intending to slip out directly Ralph was safe inside his own room.

"Noggs!" cried Ralph. "Where is that fellow?—Noggs!"

But not a word said Newman.

"The dog has gone to his dinner, though I told him not," muttered Ralph, looking into the office, and pulling out his watch. "Humph! You had better come in here, Gride. My man's out, and the sun is hot upon my room. This is cool and in the shade, if you don't mind roughing it."

"Not at all, Mr. Nickleby, oh, not at all! All places are alike to me, sir. Ah! very nice indeed. Oh! very nice!"

The person who made this reply was a little old man, of about seventy or seventy-five years of age, of a very lean figure, much bent and slightly twisted. He wore a grey coat with a very narrow collar, an old-fashioned waistcoat of ribbed black silk, and such scanty trousers as displayed his shrunken spindle-shanks in their full ugliness. The only articles of display or ornament in his dress were a steel watch-chain, to which were attached some large gold seals; and a black ribbon into which, in compliance with an old fashion scarcely ever observed in

these days, his grey hair was gathered behind. His nose and chin were sharp and prominent, his jaws had fallen inwards from loss of teeth, his face was shrivelled and yellow, save where the cheeks were streaked with the colour of a dry winter apple; and, where his beard had been, there lingered yet a few grey tufts which seemed, like the ragged eyebrows, to denote the badness of the soil from which they sprung. The whole air and attitude of the form was one of stealthy cat-like obsequiousness; the whole expression of the face was concentrated in a

"NO MATTER! DO YOU THINK YOU BRING YOUR PALTRY MONEY HERE AS A FAVOUR OR A GIFT; OR AS A MATTER OF BUSINESS, AND IN RETURN FOR VALUE RECEIVED?"

wrinkled leer, compounded of cunning, lecherousness, slyness, and avarice.

Such was old Arthur Gride, in whose face there was not a wrinkle, in whose dress there was not one spare fold or plait, but expressed the most covetous and griping penury, and sufficiently indicated his belonging to that class of which Ralph Nickleby was a member. Such was old Arthur Gride, as he sat in a low chair looking up into the face of Ralph Nickleby, who, lounging upon the tall office stool, with his arms upon his knees, looked down into his,

—a match for him, on whatever errand he had come.

"And how have you been?" said Gride, feigning great interest in Ralph's state of health. "I haven't seen you for—oh! not for——"

"Not for a long time," said Ralph with a peculiar smile, importing that he very well knew it was not on a mere visit of compliment that his friend had come. "It was a narrow chance that you saw me now, for I had only just come up to the door as you turned the corner."

"I am very lucky," observed Gride.

"So men say," replied Ralph drily.

The older money-lender wagged his chin and smiled, but he originated no new remark, and they sat for some little time without speaking. Each was looking out to take the other at a disadvantage.

"Come, Gride," said Ralph at length; "what's in the wind to-day?"

"Aha! you're a bold man, Mr. Nickleby," cried the other, apparently very much relieved by Ralph's leading the way to business. "Oh dear, dear, what a bold man you are!"

"Why, you have a sleek and slinking way with you that makes me seem so by contrast," returned Ralph. "I don't know but that yours may answer better, but I want the patience for it."

"You were born a genius, Mr. Nickleby," said old Arthur. "Deep, deep, deep. Ah!"

"Deep enough," retorted Ralph, "to know that I shall need all the depth I have, when men like you begin to compliment. You know I have stood by when you fawned and flattered other people, and I remember pretty well what *that* always led to."

"Ha, ha, ha!" rejoined Arthur, rubbing his hands. "So you do, so you do, no doubt. Not a man knows it better. Well, it's a pleasant thing now to think that you remember old times. Oh dear!"

"Now then," said Ralph composedly; "what's in the wind, I ask again—what is it?"

"See that, now!" cried the other. "He can't even keep from business while we're chatting ever bygones. Oh dear, dear, what a man it is!"

"*Which* of the bygones do you want to revive?" said Ralph. "One of them, I know, or you wouldn't talk about them."

"He suspects even me!" cried old Arthur, holding up his hands. "Even me—oh dear, even me! What a man it is! Ha, ha, ha! What a man it is! Mr. Nickleby against all the world—there's nobody like him. A giant among pigmies—a giant—a giant!"

Ralph looked at the old dog with a quiet smile as he chuckled on in this strain, and Newman Noggs in the closet felt his heart sink within him as the prospect of dinner grew fainter and fainter.

"I must humour him, though," cried old Arthur; "he must have his way—a wilful man, as the Scotch say—well, well, they're a wise people, the Scotch—he will talk about business, and won't give away his time for nothing. He's very right. Time is money—time is money."

"He was one of us who made that saying, I should think," said Ralph. "Time is money, and very good money too, to those who reckon interest by it. Time *is* money! Yes, and time costs money—it's rather an expensive article to some people we could name, or I forget my trade."

In rejoinder to this sally, old Arthur again raised his hands, again chuckled, and again ejaculated "What a man it is!" which done, he dragged the low chair a little nearer to Ralph's high stool, and, looking upwards into his immovable face, said:

"What would you say to me if I was to tell you that I was—that I was—going to be married?"

"I should tell you," replied Ralph, looking coldly down upon him, "that for some purpose of your own you told a lie, and that it wasn't the first time, and wouldn't be the last; that I wasn't surprised, and wasn't to be taken in."

"Then I tell you seriously that I am," said old Arthur.

"And *I* tell you seriously," rejoined Ralph, "what I told you this minute. Stay. Let me look at you. There's a lickerish devilry in your face. What is this?"

"I wouldn't deceive *you*, you know," whined Arthur Gride; "I couldn't do it. I should be mad to try. I—I—to deceive Mr. Nickleby! The pigmy to impose upon the giant! I ask again—he, he, he!—what should you say to me if I was to tell you that I was going to be married?"

"To some old hag?" said Ralph.

"No, no," cried Arthur, interrupting him, and rubbing his hands in an ecstasy. "Wrong, wrong again. Mr. Nickleby for once at fault—out, quite out! To a young and beautiful girl; fresh, lovely, bewitching, and not nineteen. Dark eyes—long eyelashes—ripe and ruddy lips that to look at is to long to kiss—beautiful clustering hair that one's fingers itch to play with—such a waist as might make a man clasp the air involuntarily, thinking of twining his arm about it—little feet that tread so lightly they hardly seem to walk upon the ground—to marry all this, sir—this—hey, hey?"

"This is something more than common drivelling," said Ralph after listening with a curled lip to the old sinner's raptures. "The girl's name?"

"Oh, deep, deep! See, now, how deep that is!" exclaimed old Arthur. "He knows I want his help, he knows he can give it me, he knows it must all turn to his advantage, he sees the thing already. Her name—— Is there nobody within hearing?"

"Why, who the devil should there be?" retorted Ralph testily.

"I didn't know but that perhaps somebody might be passing up or down the stairs," said Arthur Gride, after looking out at the door and carefully re-closing it; "or but that your man might have come back, and might have been listening outside—clerks and servants have a trick of listening, and I should have been very uncomfortable if Mr. Noggs——"

"Curse Mr. Noggs!" said Ralph sharply, "and go on with what you have to say."

"Curse Mr. Noggs, by all means," rejoined old Arthur: "I am sure I have not the least objection to that. Her name is——"

"Well," said Ralph, rendered very irritable by old Arthur's pausing again, "what is it?"

"Madeline Bray."

Whatever reasons there might have been—and Arthur Gride appeared to have anticipated some—for the mention of this name producing an effect upon Ralph, or whatever effect it really did produce upon him, he permitted none to manifest itself, but calmly repeated the name several times, as if reflecting when and where he had heard it before.

"Bray," said Ralph. "Bray—there was young Bray of—— No, he never had a daughter."

"You remember Bray?" rejoined Arthur Gride.

"No," said Ralph, looking vacantly at him.

"Not Walter Bray! The dashing man, who used his handsome wife so ill?"

"If you seek to recall any particular dashing man to my recollection by such a trait as that," said Ralph, shrugging his shoulders, "I shall confound him with nine-tenths of the dashing men I have ever known."

"Tut, tut! That Bray who is now in the Rules of the Bench," said old Arthur. "You can't have forgotten Bray. Both of us did business with him. Why, he owes you money——"

"Oh, *him!*" rejoined Ralph. "Ay, ay! Now you speak. Oh! It's *his* daughter, is it?"

Naturally as this was said, it was not said so naturally but that a kindred spirit like old Arthur Gride might have discerned a design upon the part of Ralph to lead him on to much more explicit statements and explanations than he would have volunteered, or that Ralph could in all likelihood have obtained by any other means. Old Arthur, however, was so intent upon his own designs, that he suffered himself to be overreached, and had no suspicion but that his good friend was in earnest.

"I knew you couldn't forget him when you came to think for a moment," he said.

"You were right," answered Ralph. "But old Arthur Gride and matrimony is a most anomalous conjunction of words; old Arthur Gride and dark eyes and eyelashes, and lips that to look at is to long to kiss, and clustering hair that he wants to play with, and waists that he wants to span, and little feet that don't tread upon anything—old Arthur Gride and such things as these is more monstrous still; but old Arthur Gride marrying the daughter of a ruined 'dashing man' in the Rules of the Bench is the most monstrous and incredible of all. Plainly, friend Arthur Gride, if you want any help from me in this business (which of course you do, or you would not be here), speak out, and to the purpose. And, above all, don't talk to me of its turning to my advantage, for I know it must turn to yours also, and to a good round tune too, or you would have no finger in such a pie as this."

There was enough acerbity and sarcasm not only in the matter of Ralph's speech, but in the tone of voice in which he uttered it, and the looks with which he eked it out, to have fired even the ancient usurer's cold blood, and flushed even his withered cheek. But he gave vent to no demonstration of anger, contenting himself with exclaiming, as before, "What a man it is!" and rolling his head from side to side, as if in unrestrained enjoyment of his freedom and drollery. Clearly observing, however, from the expression in Ralph's features, that he had best come to the point as speedily as might be, he composed himself for more serious business, and entered upon the pith and marrow of his negotiation.

First, he dwelt upon the fact that Madeline Bray was devoted to the support and maintenance, and was a slave to every wish, of her only parent, who had no other friend on earth; to which Ralph rejoined that he had heard something of the kind before, and that, if she had known a little more of the world, she wouldn't have been such a fool.

Secondly, he enlarged upon the character of her father, arguing that, even taking it for

granted that he loved her in return with the utmost affection of which he was capable, yet he loved himself a great deal better; which Ralph said it was quite unnecessary to say anything more about, as that was very natural, and probable enough.

And, thirdly, old Arthur premised that the girl was a delicate and beautiful creature, and that he had really a hankering to have her for his wife. To this Ralph deigned no other rejoinder than a harsh smile, and a glance at the shrivelled old creature before him, which were, however, sufficiently expressive.

"Now," said Gride, "for the little plan I have in my mind to bring this about; because I haven't offered myself even to the father yet, I should have told you. But that you have gathered already? Ah! oh dear, oh dear, what an edged tool you are!"

"Don't play with me, then," said Ralph impatiently. "You know the proverb."

"A reply always on the tip of his tongue!" cried old Arthur, raising his hands and eyes in admiration. "He is always prepared! Oh dear, what a blessing to have such a ready wit, and so much ready money to back it!" Then, suddenly changing his tone, he went on:—"I have been backwards and forwards to Bray's lodgings several times within the last six months. It is just half a year since I first saw this delicate morsel, and, oh dear, what a delicate morsel it is! But that is neither here nor there. I am his detaining creditor for seventeen hundred pounds!"

"You talk as if you were the only detaining creditor," said Ralph, pulling out his pocket-book. "I am another for nine hundred and seventy-five pounds four and threepence."

"The only other, Mr. Nickleby," said old Arthur eagerly. "The only other. Nobody else went to the expense of lodging a detainer, trusting to our holding him fast enough, I warrant you. We both fell into the same snare—oh dear, what a pitfall it was; it almost ruined me! And lent him our money upon bills, with only one name besides his own, which to be sure everybody supposed to be a good one, and was as negotiable as money, but which turned out—you know how. Just as we should have come upon him, he died insolvent. Ah! it went very nigh to ruin me, that loss did!"

"Go on with your scheme," said Ralph. "It's of no use raising the cry of our trade just now; there's nobody to hear us!"

"It's always as well to talk that way," returned old Arthur with a chuckle, "whether there's anybody to hear us or not. Practice makes perfect, you know. Now, if I offer myself to Bray as his son-in-law, upon one simple condition—that the moment I am fast married he shall be quietly released, and have an allowance to live just t'other side the water like a gentleman (he can't live long, for I have asked his doctor, and he declares that his complaint is one of the Heart, and it is impossible), and if all the advantages of this condition are properly stated and dwelt upon to him, do you think he could resist me? And if he could not resist *me*, do you think his daughter could resist *him*? Shouldn't I have her Mrs. Arthur Gride—pretty Mrs. Arthur Gride—a tit-bit—a dainty chick—shouldn't I have her Mrs. Arthur Gride in a week, a month, a day—any time I chose to name?"

"Go on," said Ralph, nodding his head deliberately, and speaking in a tone whose studied coldness presented a strange contrast to the rapturous squeak to which his friend had gradually mounted. "Go on. You didn't come here to ask me that."

"Oh dear, how you talk!" cried old Arthur, edging himself closer still to Ralph. "Of course I didn't—I don't pretend I did! I came to ask what you would take from me, if I prospered with the father, for this debt of yours—five shillings in the pound—six-and-eightpence—ten shillings? I *would* go as far as ten for such a friend as you, we have always been on such good terms, but you won't be so hard upon me as that, I know. Now, will you?"

"There's something more to be told," said Ralph, as stony and immovable as ever.

"Yes, yes, there is, but you won't give me time," returned Arthur Gride. "I want a backer in this matter—one who can talk, and urge, and press a point, which you can do as no man can. I can't do that, for I am a poor, timid, nervous creature. Now, if you get a good composition for this debt, which you long ago gave up for lost, you'll stand my friend, and help me. Won't you?"

"There's something more," said Ralph.

"No, no, indeed," cried Arthur Gride.

"Yes, yes, indeed. I tell you yes," said Ralph.

"Oh!" returned old Arthur, feigning to be suddenly enlightened. "You mean something more as concerns myself and my intention. Ay, surely, surely. Shall I mention that?"

"I think you had better," rejoined Ralph drily.

"I didn't like to trouble you with that, because I supposed your interest would cease with your own concern in the affair," said Arthur

Gride. "That's kind of you to ask. Oh dear, how very kind of you! Why, supposing I had a knowledge of some property—some little property—very little—to which this pretty chick was entitled; which nobody does or can know of at this time, but which her husband could sweep into his pouch, if he knew as much as I do, would that account for——"

"For the whole proceeding," rejoined Ralph abruptly. "Now, let me turn this matter over, and consider what I ought to have if I should help you to success."

"But don't be hard," cried old Arthur, raising his hands with an imploring gesture, and speaking in a tremulous voice. "Don't be too hard upon me. It's a very small property, it is indeed. Say the ten shillings, and we'll close the bargain. It's more than I ought to give, but you're so kind. Shall we say the ten? Do, now, do!"

Ralph took no notice of these supplications, but sat for three or four minutes in a brown study, looking thoughtfully at the person from whom they proceeded. After sufficient cogitation he broke silence, and it certainly could not be objected that he used any needless circumlocution, or failed to speak directly to the purpose.

"If you married this girl without me," said Ralph, "you must pay my debt in full, because you couldn't set her father free otherwise. It's plain, then, that I must have the whole amount, clear of all deduction or encumbrance, or I should lose from being honoured with your confidence, instead of gaining by it. That's the first article of the treaty. For the second, I shall stipulate that for my trouble in negotiation and persuasion, and helping you to this fortune, I have five hundred pounds. That's very little, because you have the ripe lips, and the clustering hair, and what not, all to yourself. For the third and last article, I require that you execute a bond to me, this day, binding yourself in the payment of these two sums before noon of the day of your marriage with Madeline Bray. You have told me I can urge and press a point. I press this one, and will take nothing less than these terms. Accept them if you like. If not, marry her without me if you can. I shall still get my debt."

To all entreaties, protestations, and offers of compromise between his own proposals and those which Arthur Gride had first suggested, Ralph was deaf as an adder. He would enter into no further discussion of the subject, and while old Arthur dilated upon the enormity of his demands, and proposed modifications of them, approaching by degrees nearer and nearer to the terms he resisted, sat perfectly mute, looking with an air of quiet abstraction over the entries and papers in his pocket-book. Finding that it was impossible to make any impression upon his staunch friend, Arthur Gride, who had prepared himself for some such result before he came, consented with a heavy heart to the proposed treaty, and upon the spot filled up the bond required (Ralph kept such instruments handy), after exacting the condition that Mr. Nickleby should accompany him to Bray's lodgings that very hour, and open the negotiation at once, should circumstances appear auspicious and favourable to their designs.

In pursuance of this last understanding the worthy gentlemen went out together shortly afterwards, and Newman Noggs emerged, bottle in hand, from the cupboard, out of the upper door of which, at the imminent risk of detection, he had more than once thrust his red nose when such parts of the subject were under discussion as interested him most.

"I have no appetite now," said Newman, putting the flask in his pocket. "I've had *my* dinner."

Having delivered this observation in a very grievous and doleful tone, Newman reached the door in one long limp, and came back again in another.

"I don't know who she may be, or what she may be," he said: "but I pity her with all my heart and soul; and I can't help her, nor can I any of the people against whom a hundred tricks—but none so vile as this—are plotted every day! Well, that adds to my pain, but not to theirs. The thing is no worse because I know it, and it tortures me as well as them. Gride and Nickleby! Good pair for a curricle. Oh, roguery! roguery! roguery!"

With these reflections, and a very hard knock on the crown of his unfortunate hat at each repetition of the last word, Newman Noggs, whose brain was a little muddled by so much of the contents of the pocket pistol as had found their way there during his recent concealment, went forth to seek such consolation as might be derivable from the beef and greens of some cheap eating-house.

Meanwhile the two plotters had betaken themselves to the same house whither Nicholas had repaired for the first time but a few mornings before, and having obtained access to Mr. Bray, and found his daughter from home, had, by a train of the most masterly approaches that Ralph's utmost skill could frame, at length laid open the real object of their visit.

"There he sits, Mr. Bray," said Ralph, as the invalid, not yet recovered from his surprise, reclined in his chair, looking alternately at him and Arthur Gride. "What if he has had the ill-fortune to be one cause of your detention in this place—I have been another; men must live; you are too much a man of the world not to see that in its true light. We offer the best reparation in our power. Reparation! Here is an offer of marriage, that many a titled father would leap at for his child. Mr. Arthur Gride, with the fortune of a prince. Think what a haul it is!"

"My daughter, sir," returned Bray haughtily, "as *I* have brought her up, would be a rich recompense for the largest fortune that a man could bestow in exchange for her hand."

"Precisely what I told you," said the artful Ralph, turning to his friend, old Arthur. "Precisely what made me consider the thing so fair and easy. There is no obligation on either side. You have money, and Miss Madeline has beauty and worth. She has youth, you have money. She has not money, you have not youth. Tit for tat—quits—a match of Heaven's own making!"

"Matches are made in Heaven, they say," added Arthur Gride, leering hideously at the father-in-law he wanted. "If we are married, it will be destiny, according to that."

"Then think, Mr. Bray," said Ralph, hastily substituting for this argument considerations more nearly allied to earth, "think what a stake is involved in the acceptance or rejection of these proposals of my friend——"

"How can I accept or reject?" interrupted Mr. Bray, with an irritable consciousness that it really rested with him to decide. "It is for my daughter to accept or reject; it is for my daughter. You know that."

"True," said Ralph emphatically; "but you have still the power to advise; to state the reasons for and against; to hint a wish."

"To hint a wish, sir!" returned the debtor, proud and mean by turns, and selfish at all times. "I am her father, am I not? Why should I hint, and beat about the bush? Do you suppose, like her mother's friends and my enemies—a curse upon them all!—that there is anything in what she has done for me but duty, sir, but duty? Or do you think that my having been unfortunate is a sufficient reason why our relative positions should be changed, and that she should command, and I should obey? Hint a wish, too! Perhaps you think, because you see me in this place, and scarcely able to leave this chair without assistance, that I am some broken-spirited dependent creature, without the courage or power to do what I may think best for my own child. Still the power to hint a wish! I hope so!"

"Pardon me," returned Ralph, who thoroughly knew his man, and had taken his ground accordingly; "you do not hear me out. I was about to say that your hinting a wish—even hinting a wish—would surely be equivalent to commanding."

"Why, of course it would," retorted Mr. Bray in an exasperated tone. "If you don't happen to have heard of the time, sir, I tell you that there was a time when I carried every point in triumph against her mother's whole family, although they had power and wealth on their side—by my will alone."

"Still," rejoined Ralph as mildly as his nature would allow him, "you have not heard me out. You are a man yet qualified to shine in society, with many years of life before you—that is, if you lived in freer air, and under brighter skies, and chose your own companions. Gaiety is your element; you have shone in it before. Fashion and freedom for you. France, and an annuity that would support you there in luxury, would give you a new lease of life—transfer you to a new existence. The town rang with your expensive pleasures once, and you could blaze up on a new scene again, profiting by experience, and living a little at others' cost, instead of letting others live at yours. What is there on the reverse side of the picture? What is there? I don't know which is the nearest churchyard, but a gravestone there, wherever it is, and a date—perhaps two years hence, perhaps twenty. That's all."

Mr. Bray rested his elbow on the arm of his chair, and shaded his face with his hand.

"I speak plainly," said Ralph, sitting down beside him, "because I feel strongly. It's my interest that you should marry your daughter to my friend Gride, because then he sees me paid—in part, that is. I don't disguise it. I acknowledge it openly. But what interest have you in recommending her to such a step? Keep that in view. She might object, remonstrate, shed tears, talk of his being too old, and plead that her life would be rendered miserable. But what is it now?"

Several slight gestures on the part of the invalid showed that these arguments were no more lost upon him than the smallest iota of his demeanour was upon Ralph.

"What is it now, I say," pursued the wily usurer, "or what has it a chance of being? If you died, indeed, the people you hate would

make her happy. But can you bear the thought of that?"

"No!" returned Bray, urged by a vindictive impulse he could not repress.

"I should imagine not, indeed!" said Ralph quietly. "If she profits by anybody's death," this was said in a lower tone, "let it be by her husband's—don't let her have to look back to yours as the event from which to date a happier life. Where is the objection? Let me hear it stated. What is it? That her suitor is an old man? Why, how often do men of family and fortune, who haven't your excuse, but have all the means and superfluities of life within their reach—how often do they marry their daughters to old men, or (worse still) to young men without heads or hearts, to tickle some idle vanity, strengthen some family interest, or secure some seat in Parliament! Judge for her, sir, judge for her. You must know best, and she will live to thank you."

"Hush! hush!" cried Mr. Bray, suddenly starting up, and covering Ralph's mouth with his trembling hand. "I hear her at the door!"

There was a gleam of conscience in the shame and terror of this hasty action, which, in one short moment, tore the thin covering of sophistry from the cruel design, and laid it bare in all its meanness and heartless deformity. The father fell into his chair pale and trembling; Arthur Gride plucked and fumbled at his hat, and durst not raise his eyes from the floor; even Ralph crouched for the moment like a beaten hound, cowed by the presence of one young innocent girl!

The effect was almost as brief as sudden. Ralph was the first to recover himself, and, observing Madeline's looks of alarm, entreated the poor girl to be composed, assuring her that there was no cause for fear.

"A sudden spasm," said Ralph, glancing at Mr. Bray. "He is quite well now."

It might have moved a very hard and worldly heart to see the young and beautiful creature, whose certain misery they had been contriving but a minute before, throw her arms about her father's neck, and pour forth words of tender sympathy and love, the sweetest a father's ear can know, or child's lips form. But Ralph looked coldly on; and Arthur Gride, whose bleared eyes gloated only over the outward beauties, and were blind to the spirit which reigned within, evinced—a fantastic kind of warmth certainly, but not exactly that kind of warmth of feeling which the contemplation of virtue usually inspires.

"Madeline," said her father, gently disengaging himself, "it was nothing."

"But you had that spasm yesterday, and it is terrible to see you in such pain. Can I do nothing for you?"

"Nothing just now. Here are two gentlemen, Madeline, one of whom you have seen before. She used to say," added Mr. Bray, addressing Arthur Gride, "that the sight of you always made me worse. That was natural, knowing what she did, and only what she did, of our connection and its results. Well, well! Perhaps she may change her mind on that point; girls have leave to change their minds, you know. You are very tired, my dear."

"I am not, indeed."

"Indeed you are. You do too much."

"I wish I could do more."

"I know you do, but you overtask your strength. This wretched life, my love, of daily labour and fatigue, is more than you can bear, I am sure it is. Poor Madeline!"

With these and many more kind words, Mr. Bray drew his daughter to him, and kissed her cheek affectionately. Ralph, watching him sharply and closely in the meantime, made his way towards the door, and signed to Gride to follow him.

"You will communicate with us again?" said Ralph.

"Yes, yes," returned Mr. Bray, hastily thrusting his daughter aside. "In a week. Give me a week."

"One week," said Ralph, turning to his companion, "from to-day. Good morning. Miss Madeline, I kiss your hand."

"We will shake hands, Gride," said Mr. Bray, extending his, as old Arthur bowed. "You mean well, no doubt. I am bound to say so now. If I owed you money, that was not your fault. Madeline, my love—your hand here."

"Oh dear! If the young lady would condescend—only the tips of her fingers," said Arthur, hesitating and half retreating.

Madeline shrunk involuntarily from the goblin figure, but she placed the tips of her fingers in his hand, and instantly withdrew them. After an ineffectual clutch, intended to detain and carry them to his lips, old Arthur gave his own fingers a mumbling kiss, and, with many amorous distortions of visage, went in pursuit of his friend, who was by this time in the street.

"What does he say, what does he say? What does the giant say to the pigmy?" inquired Arthur Gride, hobbling up to Ralph.

"What does the pigmy say to the giant?"

rejoined Ralph, elevating his eyebrows, and looking down upon his questioner.

"He doesn't know what to say," replied Arthur Gride. "He hopes and fears. But is she not a dainty morsel?"

"I have no great taste for beauty," growled Ralph.

"But I have," rejoined Arthur, rubbing his hands. "Oh dear! How handsome her eyes looked when she was stooping over him—such long lashes—such delicate fringe! She—she—looked at me so soft."

"Not over-lovingly, I think," said Ralph. "Did she?"

"No, you think not?" replied old Arthur. "But don't you think it can be brought about—don't you think it can?"

Ralph looked at him with a contemptuous frown, and replied with a sneer, and between his teeth:

"Did you mark his telling her she was tired and did too much, and overtasked her strength?"

"Ay, ay. What of it?"

"When do you think he ever told her that before? The life is more than she can bear. Yes, yes. He'll change it for her."

"D'ye think it's done?" inquired old Arthur, peering into his companion's face with half-closed eyes.

"I am sure it's done," said Ralph. "He is trying to deceive himself, even before our eyes, already—making believe that he thinks of her good, and not his own—acting a virtuous part, and so considerate and affectionate, sir, that the daughter scarcely knew him. I saw a tear of surprise in her eye. There'll be a few more tears of surprise there before long, though of a different kind. Oh! we may wait with confidence for this day week."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BEING FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES, AND POSITIVELY HIS LAST APPEARANCE ON THIS STAGE.

IT was with a very sad and heavy heart, oppressed by many painful ideas, that Nicholas retraced his steps eastward, and betook himself to the counting-house of Cheeryble Brothers. Whatever the idle hopes he had suffered himself to entertain, whatever the pleasant visions which had sprung up in his mind and grouped themselves round the fair image of Madeline Bray, they were now dispelled, and not a vestige of their gaiety and brightness remained.

It would be a poor compliment to Nicholas's better nature, and one which he was very far from deserving, to insinuate that the solution, and such a solution, of the mystery which had seemed to surround Madeline Bray, when he was ignorant even of her name, had damped his ardour or cooled the fervour of his admiration. If he had regarded her before with such a passion as young men attracted by mere beauty and elegance may entertain, he was now conscious of much deeper and stronger feelings. But, reverence for the truth and purity of her heart, respect for the helplessness and loneliness of her situation, sympathy with the trials of one so young and fair, and admiration of her great and noble spirit, all seemed to raise her far above his reach, and, while they imparted new depth and dignity to his love, to whisper that it was hopeless.

"I will keep my word, as I have pledged it to her," said Nicholas manfully. "This is no common trust that I have to discharge, and I will perform the double duty that is imposed upon me most scrupulously and strictly. My secret feelings deserve no consideration in such a case as this, and they shall have none."

Still, there were the secret feelings in existence just the same, and in secret Nicholas rather encouraged them than otherwise; reasoning (if he reasoned at all) that there they could do no harm to anybody but himself, and that, if he kept them to himself from a sense of duty, he had an additional right to entertain himself with them as a reward for his heroism.

All these thoughts, coupled with what he had seen that morning and the anticipation of his next visit, rendered him a very dull and abstracted companion; so much so, indeed, that Tim Linkinwater suspected he must have made the mistake of a figure somewhere, which was preying upon his mind, and seriously conjured him, if such were the case, to make a clean breast and scratch it out, rather than have his whole life embittered by the tortures of remorse.

But in reply to these considerate representations, and many others both from Tim and Mr. Frank, Nicholas could only be brought to state that he was never merrier in his life; and so went on all day, and so went towards home at night, still turning over and over again the same subjects, thinking over and over again the same things, and arriving over and over again at the same conclusions.

In this pensive, wayward, and uncertain state,

people are apt to lounge and loiter without knowing why, to read placards on the walls with great attention and without the smallest idea of one word of their contents, and to stare most earnestly through shop-windows at things which they don't see. It was thus that Nicholas found himself poring with the utmost interest over a large play-bill hanging outside a Minor Theatre which he had to pass on his way home, and reading a list of the actors and actresses who had promised to do honour to some approaching benefit, with as much gravity as if it had been a catalogue of the names of those ladies and gentlemen who stood highest upon the Book of Fate, and he had been looking anxiously for his own. He glanced at the top of the bill, with a smile at his own dulness, as he prepared to resume his walk, and there saw announced, in large letters with a large space between each of them, "Positively the last appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity!!!"

"Nonsense!" said Nicholas, turning back again. "It can't be."

But there it was. In one line by itself was an announcement of the first night of a new melodrama; in another line by itself was an announcement of the last six nights of an old one; a third line was devoted to the re-engagement of the unrivalled African Knife-swallower, who had kindly suffered himself to be prevailed upon to forego his country engagements for one week longer; a fourth line announced that Mr. Snittle Timberry, having recovered from his late severe indisposition, would have the honour of appearing that evening; a fifth line said that there were "Cheers, Tears, and Laughter!" every night; a sixth, that that was positively the last appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity.

"Surely it must be the same man," thought Nicholas. "There can't be two Vincent Crummleses."

The better to settle this question, he referred to the bill again, and finding that there was a Baron in the first piece, and that Roberto (his son) was enacted by one Master Crummles, and Spaletro (his nephew) by one Master Percy Crummles—*their* last appearances—and that, incidental to the piece, was a characteristic dance by the characters, and a castanet pas seul by the Infant Phenomenon—*her* last appearance—he no longer entertained any doubt; and presenting himself at the stage-door, and sending in a scrap of paper with "Mr. Johnson" written thereon in pencil, was presently conducted by a Robber, with a very large belt and buckle round his waist, and very large leather gauntlets on his hands, into the presence of his former manager.

Mr. Crummles was unfeignedly glad to see him, and starting up from before a small dressing-glass, with one very bushy eyebrow stuck on crooked over his left eye, and the fellow eyebrow and the calf of one of his legs in his hand, embraced him cordially; at the same time observing that it would do Mrs. Crummles's heart good to bid him good-bye before they went.

"You were always a favourite of hers, Johnson," said Crummles, "always were from the first. I was quite easy in my mind about you from that first day you dined with us. One that Mrs. Crummles took a fancy to was sure to turn out right. Ah, Johnson, what a woman that is!"

"I am sincerely obliged to her for her kindness in this and all other respects," said Nicholas. "But where are you going, that you talk about bidding good-bye?"

"Haven't you seen it in the papers?" said Crummles with some dignity.

"No," replied Nicholas.

"I wonder at that," said the manager. "It was among the varieties. I had the paragraph here somewhere—but I don't know—oh yes, here it is."

So saying, Mr. Crummles, after pretending that he thought he must have lost it, produced a square inch of newspaper from the pocket of the pantaloons he wore in private life (which, together with the plain clothes of several other gentlemen, lay scattered about on a kind of dresser in the room), and gave it to Nicholas to read:

"The talented Vincent Crummles, long favourably known to fame as a country manager and actor of no ordinary pretensions, is about to cross the Atlantic on a histrionic expedition. Crummles is to be accompanied, we hear, by his lady and gifted family. We know no man superior to Crummles in his particular line of character, or one who, whether as a public or private individual, could carry with him the best wishes of a larger circle of friends. Crummles is certain to succeed."

"Here's another bit," said Mr. Crummles, handing over a still smaller scrap. "This is from the notices to correspondents, this one."

Nicholas read it aloud. "'Philo-Dramaticus.—Crummles, the country manager and actor, cannot be more than forty-three or forty-four years of age. Crummles is NOT a Prussian, having been born at Chelsea.' Humph!" said Nicholas, "that's an odd paragraph."

"Very," returned Crummles, scratching the side of his nose, and looking at Nicholas with

an assumption of great unconcern. "I can't think who puts these things in. *I* didn't."

Still keeping his eye on Nicholas, Mr. Crummles shook his head twice or thrice with profound gravity, and remarking that he could not, for the life of him, imagine how the newspapers found out the things they did, folded up the extracts, and put them in his pocket again.

"I am astonished to hear this news," said Nicholas. "Going to America! You had no such thing in contemplation when I was with you."

"No," replied Crummles, "I hadn't then. The fact is that Mrs. Crummles—most extraordinary woman, Johnson." Here he broke off, and whispered something in his ear.

"Oh!" said Nicholas, smiling. "The prospect of an addition to your family?"

"The seventh addition, Johnson," returned Mr. Crummles solemnly. "I thought such a child as the Phenomenon must have been a closer; but it seems we are to have another. She is a very remarkable woman."

"I congratulate you," said Nicholas, "and I hope this may prove a phenomenon too."

"Why, it's pretty sure to be something uncommon, I suppose," rejoined Mr. Crummles. "The talent of the other three is principally in combat and serious pantomime. I should like this one to have a turn for juvenile tragedy; I understand they want something of that sort in America very much. However, we must take it as it comes. Perhaps it may have a genius for the tight-rope. It may have any sort of genius, in short, if it takes after its mother, Johnson, for she is an universal genius; but, whatever its genius is, that genius shall be developed."

Expressing himself after these terms, Mr. Crummles put on his other eyebrow, and the calves of his legs, and then put on his legs, which were of a yellowish flesh colour, and rather soiled about the knees, from frequent going down upon those joints, in curses, prayers, last struggles, and other strong passages.

While the ex-manager completed his toilet, he informed Nicholas that as he should have a fair start in America from the proceeds of a tolerably good engagement, which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and as he and Mrs. Crummles could scarcely hope to act for ever—not being immortal, except in the breath of Fame and in a figurative sense—he had made up his mind to settle there permanently, in the hope of acquiring some land of his own which would support them in their old age, and which they could afterwards bequeath to their children.

Nicholas having highly commended this resolution, Mr. Crummles went on to impart such further intelligence relative to their mutual friends as he thought might prove interesting; informing Nicholas, among other things, that Miss Snevellicci was happily married to an affluent young wax-chandler who had supplied the theatre with candles, and that Mr. Lillyvick didn't dare to say his soul was his own, such was the tyrannical sway of Mrs. Lillyvick, who reigned paramount and supreme.

Nicholas responded to this confidence on the part of Mr. Crummles by confiding to him his own name, situation, and prospects, and informing him, in as few general words as he could, of the circumstances which had led to their first acquaintance. After congratulating him with great heartiness on the improved state of his fortunes, Mr. Crummles gave him to understand that next morning he and his were to start for Liverpool, where the vessel lay which was to carry them from the shores of England, and that, if Nicholas wished to take a last adieu of Mrs. Crummles, he must repair with him that night to a farewell supper, given in honour of the family at a neighbouring tavern; at which Mr. Snittle Timberry would preside, while the honours of the vice-chair would be sustained by the African Swallower.

The room being by this time very warm and somewhat crowded, in consequence of the influx of four gentlemen, who had just killed each other in the piece under representation, Nicholas accepted the invitation, and promised to return at the conclusion of the performances; preferring the cool air and twilight out of doors to the mingled perfume of gas, orange-peel, and gunpowder, which pervaded the hot and glaring theatre.

He availed himself of this interval to buy a silver snuff-box—the best his funds would afford—as a token of remembrance for Mr. Crummles, and having purchased, besides a pair of earrings for Mrs. Crummles, a necklace for the phenomenon, and a flaming shirt-pin for each of the young gentlemen, he refreshed himself with a walk, and, returning a little after the appointed time, found the lights out, the theatre empty, the curtain raised for the night, and Mr. Crummles walking up and down the stage expecting his arrival.

"Timberry won't be long," said Mr. Crummles. "He played the audience out to-night. He does a faithful black in the last piece, and it takes him a little longer to wash himself."

"A very unpleasant line of character, I should think?" said Nicholas.

"No, I don't know," replied Mr. Crummles; "it comes off easily enough, and there's only the face and neck. We had a first-tragedy man in our company once, who, when he played Othello, used to black himself all over. But that's feeling a part, and going into it as if you meant it; it isn't usual—more's the pity."

Mr. Snittle Timberry now appeared, arm-in-arm with the African Swallower, and, being introduced to Nicholas, raised his hat half a foot, and said he was proud to know him. The Swallower said the same, and looked and spoke remarkably like an Irishman.

"I see by the bills that you have been ill, sir," said Nicholas to Mr. Timberry. "I hope you are none the worse for your exertions to-night?"

Mr. Timberry, in reply, shook his head with a gloomy air, tapped his chest several times with great significancy, and, drawing his cloak more closely about him, said, "But no matter—no matter. Come!"

It is observable that, when people upon the stage are in any strait involving the very last extremity of weakness and exhaustion, they invariably perform feats of strength requiring great ingenuity and muscular power. Thus, a wounded prince or bandit chief, who is bleeding to death and too faint to move, except to the softest music (and then only upon his hands and knees), shall be seen to approach a cottage door for aid in such a series of writhings and twistings, and with such curlings up of the legs, and such rollings over and over, and such gettings up and tumblings down again, as could never be achieved save by a very strong man skilled in posture-making. And so natural did this sort of performance come to Mr. Snittle Timberry, that, on their way out of the theatre and towards the tavern where the supper was to be holden, he testified the severity of his recent indisposition, and its wasting effects upon the nervous system, by a series of gymnastic performances which were the admiration of all witnesses.

"Why, this is indeed a joy I had not looked for!" said Mrs. Crummles when Nicholas was presented.

"Nor I," replied Nicholas. "It is by a mere chance that I have this opportunity of seeing you, although I would have made a great exertion to have availed myself of it."

"Here is one whom you know," said Mrs. Crummles, thrusting forward the phenomenon in a blue gauze frock, extensively flounced, and trousers of the same; "and here another—and another," presenting the Master Crummleses. "And how is your friend, the faithful Digby?"

"Digby!" said Nicholas, forgetting at the instant that this had been Smike's theatrical name. "Oh yes! He's quite—what am I saying?—he is very far from well."

"How!" exclaimed Mrs. Crummles with a tragic recoil.

"I fear," said Nicholas, shaking his head, and making an attempt to smile, "that your better half would be more struck with him now than ever."

"What mean you?" rejoined Mrs. Crummles in her most popular manner. "Whence comes this altered tone?"

"I mean that a dastardly enemy of mine has struck at me through him, and that, while he thinks to torture me, he inflicts on him such agonies of terror and suspense as—— You will excuse me, I am sure," said Nicholas, checking himself. "I should never speak of this, and never do, except to those who know the facts, but for a moment I forgot myself."

With this hasty apology Nicholas stooped down to salute the phenomenon, and changed the subject; inwardly cursing his precipitation, and very much wondering what Mrs. Crummles must think of so sudden an explosion.

That lady seemed to think very little about it, for, the supper being by this time on table, she gave her hand to Nicholas, and repaired with a stately step to the left hand of Mr. Snittle Timberry. Nicholas had the honour to support her, and Mr. Crummles was placed upon the chairman's right; the phenomenon and the Master Crummleses sustained the vice.

The company amounted in number to some twenty-five or thirty, being composed of such members of the theatrical profession, then engaged or disengaged in London, as were numbered among the most intimate friends of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles. The ladies and gentlemen were pretty equally balanced; the expenses of the entertainment being defrayed by the latter, each of whom had the privilege of inviting one of the former as his guest.

It was, upon the whole, a very distinguished party, for, independently of the lesser theatrical lights who clustered on this occasion round Mr. Snittle Timberry, there was a literary gentleman present who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out—some of them faster than they had come out—and *was* a literary gentleman in consequence.

This gentleman sat on the left hand of Nicholas, to whom he was introduced by his friend the African Swallower, from the bottom of the table, with a high eulogium upon his fame and reputation.

"I am happy to know a gentleman of such great distinction," said Nicholas politely.

"Sir," replied the wit, "you're very welcome, I'm sure. The honour is reciprocal, sir, as I usually say when I dramatise a book. Did you ever hear a definition of fame, sir?"

"I have heard several," replied Nicholas with a smile. "What is yours?"

"When I dramatise a book, sir," said the literary gentleman, "*that*'s fame — for its author."

"Oh, indeed!" rejoined Nicholas.

"That's fame, sir," said the literary gentleman.

"So Richard Turpin, Tom King, and Jerry Abershaw have handed down to fame the names of those on whom they committed their most impudent robberies?" said Nicholas.

"I don't know anything about that, sir," answered the literary gentleman.

"Shakspeare dramatised stories which had previously appeared in print, it is true," observed Nicholas.

"Meaning Bill, sir?" said the literary gentleman. "So he did. Bill was an adapter, certainly, so he was—and very well he adapted too——considering."

"WAS PRESENTLY CONDUCTED BY A ROBBER, WITH A VERY LARGE BELT AND BUCKLE ROUND HIS WAIST, AND VERY LARGE LEATHER GAUNTLETS ON HIS HANDS, INTO THE PRESENCE OF HIS FORMER MANAGER."

"I was about to say," rejoined Nicholas, "that Shakspeare derived some of his plots from old tales and legends in general circulation; but it seems to me that some of the gentlemen of your craft, at the present day, have shot very far beyond him——"

"You're quite right, sir," interrupted the literary gentleman, leaning back in his chair and exercising his toothpick. "Human intellect, sir, has progressed since his time—is progressing—will progress——"

"Shot beyond him, I mean," resumed Nicholas, "in quite another respect, for, whereas he brought within the magic circle of his genius traditions peculiarly adapted for his purpose, and turned familiar things into constellations which should enlighten the world for ages, you drag within the magic circle of your dulness subjects not at all adapted to the purposes of the stage, and debase as he exalted. For instance, you take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the

capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; by a comparison of incidents and dialogue, down to the very last word he may have written a fortnight before, do your utmost to anticipate his plot—all this without his permission, and against his will; and then, to crown the whole proceeding, publish in some mean pamphlet an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work, to which you put your name as author, with the honourable distinction annexed, of having perpetrated a hundred other outrages of the same description. Now, show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man's pocket in the street: unless, indeed, it be that the legislature has a regard for pocket-handkerchiefs, and leaves men's brains, except when they are knocked out by violence, to take care of themselves."

"Men must live, sir," said the literary gentleman, shrugging his shoulders.

"That would be an equally fair plea in both cases," replied Nicholas; "but, if you put it upon that ground, I have nothing more to say than that, if I were a writer of books, and you a thirsty dramatist, I would rather pay your tavern score for six months—large as it might be—than have a niche in the Temple of Fame with you for the humblest corner of my pedestal, through six hundred generations."

The conversation threatened to take a somewhat angry tone when it had arrived thus far, but Mrs. Crummles opportunely interposed to prevent its leading to any violent outbreak, by making some inquiries of the literary gentleman relative to the plots of the six new pieces which he had written by contract to introduce the African Knife-swallower in his various unrivalled performances. This speedily engaged him in an animated conversation with that lady, in the interest of which all recollection of his recent discussion with Nicholas very quickly evaporated.

The board being now clear of the more substantial articles of food, and punch, wine, and spirits being placed upon it and handed about, the guests, who had been previously conversing in little groups of three or four, gradually fell off into a dead silence, while the majority of those present glanced from time to time at Mr. Snittle Timberry, and the bolder spirits did not even hesitate to strike the table with their knuckles, and plainly intimate their expectations, by uttering such encouragements as "Now, Tim," "Wake up, Mr. Chairman," "All charged, sir, and waiting for a toast," and so forth.

To these remonstrances Mr. Timberry deigned no other rejoinder than striking his chest and gasping for breath, and giving many other indications of being still the victim of indisposition—for a man must not make himself too cheap, either on the stage or off—while Mr. Crummles, who knew full well that he would be the subject of the forthcoming toast, sat gracefully in his chair, with his arm thrown carelessly over the back, and now and then lifted his glass to his mouth and drank a little punch, with the same air with which he was accustomed to take long draughts of nothing, out of the pasteboard goblets in banquet scenes.

At length Mr. Snittle Timberry rose in the most approved attitude, with one hand in the breast of his waistcoat, and the other on the nearest snuff-box, and, having been received with great enthusiasm, proposed with abundance of quotations, his friend Mr. Vincent Crummles: ending a pretty long speech by extending his right hand on one side, and his left on the other, and severally calling upon Mr. and Mrs. Crummles to grasp the same. This done, Mr. Vincent Crummles returned thanks, and that done, the African Swallower proposed Mrs. Vincent Crummles in affecting terms. Then were heard loud moans and sobs from Mrs. Crummles and the ladies, despite of which that heroic woman insisted upon returning thanks herself, which she did in a manner and in a speech which has never been surpassed, and seldom equalled. It then became the duty of Mr. Snittle Timberry to give the young Crummleses, which he did; after which Mr. Vincent Crummles, as their father, addressed the company in a supplementary speech, enlarging on their virtues, amiabilities, and excellences, and wishing that they were the sons and daughter of every lady and gentleman present. These solemnities having been succeeded by a decent interval, enlivened by musical and other entertainments, Mr. Crummles proposed that ornament of the profession, Mr. Snittle Timberry; and, at a little later period of the evening, the health of that other ornament of the profession, the African Swallower—his very dear friend, if he would allow him to call him so; which liberty (there being no particular reason why he should not allow it) the African Swallower graciously permitted. The literary gentleman was then about to be drunk, but it being discovered that he had been drunk for some time in another acceptation of the term, and was then asleep on the stairs, the intention was abandoned, and the honour transferred to

the ladies. Finally, after a very long sitting, Mr. Snittle Timberry vacated the chair, and the company, with many adieux and embraces, dispersed.

Nicholas waited to the last to give his little presents. When he had said good-bye all round, and came to Mr. Crummles, he could not but mark the difference between their present separation and their parting at Portsmouth. Not a jot of his theatrical manner remained; he put out his hand with an air which, if he could have summoned it at will, would have made him the best actor of his day in homely parts, and, when Nicholas shook it with the warmth he honestly felt, appeared thoroughly melted.

"We were a very happy little company, Johnson," said poor Crummles. "You and I never had a word. I shall be very glad tomorrow morning to think that I saw you again, but now I almost wish you hadn't come."

Nicholas was about to return a cheerful reply, when he was greatly disconcerted by the sudden apparition of Mrs. Grudden, who, it seemed, had declined to attend the supper in order that she might rise earlier in the morning, and who now burst out of an adjoining bedroom, habited in very extraordinary white robes; and, throwing her arms about his neck, hugged him with great affection.

"What! Are you going too?" said Nicholas, submitting with as good a grace as if she had been the finest young creature in the world.

"Going!" returned Mrs. Grudden. "Lord ha' mercy, what do you think they'd do without me?"

Nicholas submitted to another hug with even a better grace than before, if that were possible, and, waving his hat as cheerfully as he could, took farewell of the Vincent Crummleses.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CHRONICLES THE FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OF THE NICKLEBY FAMILY, AND THE SEQUEL OF THE ADVENTURE OF THE GENTLEMAN IN THE SMALL-CLOTHES.

WHILE Nicholas, absorbed in the one engrossing subject of interest which had recently opened upon him, occupied his leisure hours with thoughts of Madeline Bray, and in execution of the commissions which the anxiety of brother Charles in her behalf imposed upon him, saw her again and again, and each time with greater danger to his peace of mind and a more weakening effect upon the lofty resolutions he had formed, Mrs. Nickleby and Kate continued to live in peace and quiet, agitated by no other cares than those which were connected with certain harassing proceedings taken by Mr. Snawley for the recovery of his son, and their anxiety for Smike himself, whose health, long upon the wane, began to be so much affected by apprehension and uncertainty as sometimes to occasion both them and Nicholas considerable uneasiness, and even alarm.

It was no complaint or murmur on the part of the poor fellow himself that thus disturbed them. Ever eager to be employed in such slight services as he could render, and always anxious to repay his benefactors with cheerful and happy looks, less friendly eyes might have seen in him no cause for any misgiving. But there were times—and often too—when the sunken eye was too bright, the hollow cheek too flushed, the breath too thick and heavy in its course, the frame too feeble and exhausted, to escape their regard and notice.

There is a dread disease which so prepares its victim, as it were, for death; which so refines it of its grosser aspect, and throws around familiar looks unearthly indications of the coming change—a dread disease, in which the struggle between soul and body is so gradual, quiet, and solemn, and the result so sure, that day by day, and grain by grain, the mortal part wastes and withers away, so that the spirit grows light and sanguine with its lightening load, and, feeling immortality at hand, deems it but a new term of mortal life—a disease in which death and life are so strangely blended, that death takes the glow and hue of life, and life the gaunt and grisly form of death—a disease which medicine never cured, wealth warded off, or poverty could boast exemption from—which sometimes moves in giant strides, and sometimes at a tardy sluggish pace, but, slow or quick, is ever sure and certain.

It was with some faint reference in his own mind to this disorder, though he would by no means admit it, even to himself, that Nicholas had already carried his faithful companion to a physician of great repute. There was no cause for immediate alarm, he said. There were no present symptoms which could be deemed conclusive. The constitution had been greatly tried and injured in childhood, but still it *might* not be—and that was all.

But he seemed to grow no worse, and, as it was not difficult to find a reason for these symptoms of illness in the shock and agitation

he had recently undergone, Nicholas comforted himself with the hope that his poor friend would soon recover. This hope his mother and sister shared with him; and, as the object of their joint solicitude seemed to have no uneasiness or despondency for himself, but each day answered, with a quiet smile, that he felt better than he had upon the day before, their fears abated, and the general happiness was by degrees restored.

Many and many a time in after years did Nicholas look back to this period of his life, and tread again the humble quiet homely scenes that rose up as of old before him. Many and many a time, in the twilight of a summer evening, or beside the flickering winter's fire—but not so often or so sadly then—would his thoughts wander back to these old days, and dwell with a pleasant sorrow upon every slight remembrance which they brought crowding home. The little room in which they had so often sat long after it was dark, figuring such happy futures—Kate's cheerful voice and merry laugh; and how, if she were from home, they used to sit and watch for her return, scarcely breaking silence but to say how dull it seemed without her—the glee with which poor Smike would start from the darkened corner where he used to sit, and hurry to admit her, and the tears they often saw upon his face, half wondering to see them too, and he so pleased and happy—every little incident, and even slight words and looks, of those old days, little heeded then, but well remembered when busy cares and trials were quite forgotten, came fresh and thick before him many and many a time, and, rustling above the dusty growth of years, came back green boughs of yesterday.

But there were other persons associated with these recollections, and many changes came about before they had being—a necessary reflection for the purposes of these adventures, which at once subside into their accustomed train, and, shunning all flighty anticipations or wayward wanderings, pursue their steady and decorous course.

If the brothers Cheeryble, as they found Nicholas worthy of trust and confidence, bestowed upon him every day some new and substantial mark of kindness, they were not less mindful of those who depended on him. Various little presents to Mrs. Nickleby—always of the very things they most required—tended in no slight degree to the improvement and embellishment of the cottage. Kate's little store of trinkets became quite dazzling; and for company——! If brother Charles and brother Ned failed to look in for at least a few minutes every Sunday, or one evening in the week, there was Mr. Tim Linkinwater (who had never made half-a-dozen other acquaintances in all his life, and who took such delight in his new friends as no words can express) constantly coming and going in his evening walks, and stopping to rest; while Mr. Frank Cheeryble happened, by some strange conjunction of circumstances, to be passing the door on some business or other at least three nights in the week.

"He is the most attentive young man *I* ever saw, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby to her daughter one evening, when this last-named gentleman had been the subject of the worthy lady's eulogium for some time, and Kate had sat perfectly silent.

"Attentive, mamma!" rejoined Kate.

"Bless my heart, Kate!" cried Mrs. Nickleby with her wonted suddenness, "what a colour you have got! Why, you're quite flushed!"

"Oh, mamma! what strange things you fancy!"

"It wasn't fancy, Kate, my dear, I'm certain of that," returned her mother. "However, it's gone now, at any rate, so it don't much matter whether it was or not. What was it we were talking about? Oh! Mr. Frank. I never saw such attention in *my* life, never."

"Surely you are not serious," returned Kate, colouring again; and this time beyond all dispute.

"Not serious!" returned Mrs. Nickleby. "Why shouldn't I be serious? I'm sure I never was more serious. I will say that his politeness and attention to me is one of the most becoming, gratifying, pleasant things I have seen for a very long time. You don't often meet with such behaviour in young men, and it strikes one more when one does meet with it."

"Oh! attention to *you*, mamma," rejoined Kate quickly—"oh yes!"

"Dear me, Kate," retorted Mrs. Nickleby, "what an extraordinary girl you are! Was it likely I should be talking of his attention to anybody else? I declare I'm quite sorry to think he should be in love with a German lady, that I am."

"He said very positively that it was no such thing, mamma," returned Kate. "Don't you remember his saying so that very first night he came here? Besides," she added in a more gentle tone, "why should *we* be sorry if it is the case? What is it to us, mamma?"

"Nothing to *us*, Kate, perhaps," said Mrs. Nickleby emphatically; "but something to *me*, I confess. I like English people to be thorough English people, and not half English and half I don't know what. I shall tell him point-blank,

next time he comes, that I wish he would marry one of his own countrywomen; and see what he says to that."

"Pray don't think of such a thing, mamma," returned Kate hastily; "not for the world. Consider—how very——"

"Well, my dear, how very what?" said Mrs. Nickleby, opening her eyes in great astonishment.

Before Kate had returned any reply, a queer little double knock announced that Miss La Creevy had called to see them; and when Miss La Creevy presented herself, Mrs. Nickleby, though strongly disposed to be argumentative on the previous question, forgot all about it in a gush of supposes about the coach she had come by; supposing that the man who drove must have been either the man in the shirt-sleeves or the man with the black eye; that, whoever he was, he hadn't found that parasol she left inside last week; that no doubt they had stopped a long while at the Half-way House, coming down; or that, perhaps, being full, they had come straight on; and, lastly, that they, surely, must have passed Nicholas on the road.

"I saw nothing of him," answered Miss La Creevy; "but I saw that dear old soul, Mr. Linkinwater."

"Taking his evening walk, and coming on to rest here, before he turns back to the City, I'll be bound!" said Mrs. Nickleby.

"I should think he was," returned Miss La Creevy; "especially as young Mr. Cheeryble was with him."

"Surely that is no reason why Mr. Linkinwater should be coming here," said Kate.

"Why, I think it is, my dear," said Miss La Creevy. "For a young man, Mr. Frank is not a very great walker; and I observe that he generally falls tired, and requires a good long rest, when he has come as far as this. But where is my friend?" said the little woman, looking about, after having glanced slily at Kate. "He has not been run away with again, has he?"

"Ah! where is Mr. Smike?" said Mrs. Nickleby. "He was here this instant."

Upon further inquiry, it turned out, to the good lady's unbounded astonishment, that Smike had, that moment, gone up-stairs to bed.

"Well now," said Mrs. Nickleby, "he is the strangest creature! Last Tuesday—was it Tuesday? Yes, to be sure it was; you recollect, Kate, my dear, the very last time young Mr. Cheeryble was here—last Tuesday night he went off in just the same strange way, at the very moment the knock came to the door. It cannot be that he don't like company, because he is always fond of people who are fond of Nicholas, and I am sure young Mr. Cheeryble is. And the strangest thing is, that he does not go to bed; therefore it cannot be because he is tired. I know he doesn't go to bed, because my room is the next one, and when I went up-stairs last Tuesday, hours after him, I found that he had not even taken his shoes off; and he had no candle, so he must have sat moping in the dark all the time. Now, upon my word," said Mrs. Nickleby, "when I come to think of it, that's very extraordinary!"

As the hearers did not echo this sentiment, but remained profoundly silent, either as not knowing what to say, or as being unwilling to interrupt, Mrs. Nickleby pursued the thread of her discourse after her own fashion.

"I hope," said that lady, "that this unaccountable conduct may not be the beginning of his taking to his bed and living there all his life, like the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury, or the Cock-Lane Ghost, or some of those extraordinary creatures. One of them had some connection with our family. I forget, without looking back to some old letters I have up-stairs, whether it was my great-grandfather who went to school with the Cock-Lane Ghost, or the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury who went to school with my grandmother. Miss La Creevy, you know, of course. Which was it that didn't mind what the clergyman said? The Cock-Lane Ghost or the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury?"

"The Cock-Lane Ghost, I believe."

"Then I have no doubt," said Mrs. Nickleby, "that it was with him my great-grandfather went to school; for I know the master of his school was a Dissenter, and that would, in a great measure, account for the Cock-Lane Ghost's behaving in such an improper manner to the clergyman when he grew up. Ah! Train up a Ghost—child, I mean——"

Any further reflections on this fruitful theme were abruptly cut short by the arrival of Tim Linkinwater and Mr. Frank Cheeryble; in the hurry of receiving whom, Mrs. Nickleby speedily lost sight of everything else.

"I am so sorry Nicholas is not at home," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Kate, my dear, you must be both Nicholas and yourself."

"Miss Nickleby need be but herself," said Frank. "I—if I may venture to say so—oppose all change in her."

"Then, at all events, she shall press you to stay," returned Mrs. Nickleby. "Mr. Linkinwater says ten minutes, but I cannot let you go so soon; Nicholas would be very much vexed, I am sure. Kate, my dear——"

In obedience to a great number of nods, and winks, and frowns of extra significance, Kate added her entreaties that the visitors would remain; but it was observable that she addressed them exclusively to Tim Linkinwater; and there was, besides, a certain embarrassment in her manner, which, although it was as far from impairing its graceful character as the tinge it communicated to her cheek was from diminishing her beauty, was obvious at a glance even to Mrs. Nickleby. Not being of a very speculative character, however, save under circumstances when her speculations could be put into words and uttered aloud, that discreet matron attributed the emotion to the circumstance of her daughter's not happening to have her best frock on—"though I never saw her look better, certainly," she reflected at the same time. Having settled the question in this way, and being most complacently satisfied that in this, as in all other instances, her conjecture could not fail to be the right one, Mrs. Nickleby dismissed it from her thoughts, and inwardly congratulated herself on being so shrewd and knowing.

Nicholas did not come home, nor did Smike reappear; but neither circumstance, to say the truth, had any great effect upon the little party, who were all in the best humour possible. Indeed, there sprung up quite a flirtation between Miss La Creevy and Tim Linkinwater, who said a thousand jocose and facetious things, and became, by degrees, quite gallant, not to say tender. Little Miss La Creevy, on her part, was in high spirits, and rallied Tim on having remained a bachelor all his life with so much success, that Tim was actually induced to declare that, if he could get anybody to have him, he didn't know but what he might change his condition even yet. Miss La Creevy earnestly recommended a lady she knew, who would exactly suit Mr. Linkinwater, and had a very comfortable property of her own; but this latter qualification had very little effect upon Tim, who manfully protested that fortune would be no object with him, but that true worth and cheerfulness of disposition were what a man should look for in a wife, and that, if he had these, he could find money enough for the moderate wants of both. This avowal was considered so honourable to Tim, that neither Mrs. Nickleby nor Miss La Creevy could sufficiently extol it; and, stimulated by their praises, Tim launched out into several other declarations also manifesting the disinterestedness of his heart, and a great devotion to the fair sex: which were received with no less approbation. This was done and said with a comical mixture of jest and earnest, and, leading to a great amount of laughter, made them very merry indeed.

Kate was commonly the life and soul of the conversation at home; but she was more silent than usual upon this occasion—perhaps because Tim and Miss La Creevy engrossed so much of it—and, keeping aloof from the talkers, sat at the window watching the shadows as the evening closed in, and enjoying the quiet beauty of the night, which seemed to have scarcely less attractions to Frank, who first lingered near, and then sat down beside her. No doubt there are a great many things to be said appropriate to a summer evening, and no doubt they are best said in a low voice, as being most suitable to the peace and serenity of the hour; long pauses, too, at times, and then an earnest word or so, and then another interval of silence which, somehow, does not seem like silence either, and perhaps now and then a hasty turning away of the head, or drooping of the eyes towards the ground—all these minor circumstances, with a disinclination to have candles introduced, and a tendency to confuse hours with minutes, are doubtless mere influences of the time, as many lovely lips can clearly testify. Neither is there the slightest reason why Mrs. Nickleby should have expressed surprise when—candles being at length brought in—Kate's bright eyes were unable to bear the light, which obliged her to avert her face, and even to leave the room for some short time; because, when one has sat in the dark so long, candles *are* dazzling, and nothing can be more strictly natural than that such results should be produced, as all well-informed young people know. For that matter, old people know it too, or did know it once, but they forget these things sometimes, and more's the pity.

The good lady's surprise, however, did not end here. It was greatly increased when it was discovered that Kate had not the least appetite for supper: a discovery so alarming that there is no knowing in what unaccountable efforts of oratory Mrs. Nickleby's apprehensions might have been vented, if the general attention had not been attracted, at the moment, by a very strange and uncommon noise, proceeding, as the pale and trembling servant-girl affirmed, and as everybody's sense of hearing seemed to affirm also, "right down" the chimney of the adjoining room.

It being quite plain to the comprehension of all present that, however extraordinary and improbable it might appear, the noise did nevertheless proceed from the chimney in question;

and the noise (which was a strange compound of various shuffling, sliding, rumbling, and struggling sounds, all muffled by the chimney) still continuing, Frank Cheeryble caught up a candle, and Tim Linkinwater the tongs, and they would have very quickly ascertained the cause of this disturbance if Mrs. Nickleby had not been taken very faint, and declined being left behind, on any account. This produced a short remonstrance, which terminated in their all proceeding to the troubled chamber in a body, excepting only Miss La Creevy, who—as the servant-girl volunteered a confession of having been subject to fits in her infancy—remained with her to give the alarm and apply restoratives, in case of extremity.

Advancing to the door of the mysterious apartment, they were not a little surprised to hear a human voice, chanting with a highly-elaborated expression of melancholy, and in tones of suffocation which a human voice might have produced from under five or six feather beds of the best quality, the once popular air of "Has she then failed in her truth, the beautiful maid I adore?" Nor, on bursting into the room without demanding a parley, was their astonishment lessened by the discovery that these romantic sounds certainly proceeded from the throat of some man up the chimney, of whom nothing was visible but a pair of legs, which were dangling above the grate; apparently feeling, with extreme anxiety, for the top bar whereon to effect a landing.

A sight so unusual and unbusiness-like as this completely paralysed Tim Linkinwater, who, after one or two gentle pinches at the stranger's ankles, which were productive of no effect, stood clapping the tongs together, as if he were sharpening them for another assault, and did nothing else.

"This must be some drunken fellow," said Frank. "No thief would announce his presence thus."

As he said this with great indignation, he raised the candle to obtain a better view of the legs, and was darting forward to pull them down with very little ceremony, when Mrs. Nickleby, clasping her hands, uttered a sharp sound, something between a scream and an exclamation, and demanded to know whether the mysterious limbs were not clad in small-clothes and grey worsted stockings, or whether her eyes had deceived her.

"Yes," cried Frank, looking a little closer. "Small-clothes certainly, and—and—rough grey stockings, too. Do you know him, ma'am?"

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, deliberately sitting herself down in a chair with that sort of desperate resignation which seemed to imply that now matters had come to a crisis, and all disguise was useless, "you will have the goodness, my love, to explain precisely how this matter stands. I have given him no encouragement—none whatever—not the least in the world. You know that, my dear, perfectly well. He was very respectful—exceedingly respectful—when he declared, as you were a witness to; still, at the same time, if I am to be persecuted in this way, if vegetable what's-his-names and all kinds of garden stuff are to strew my path out of doors, and gentlemen are to come choking up our chimneys at home, I really don't know—upon my word I do *not* know—what is to become of me. It's a very hard case—harder than anything I was ever exposed to, before I married your poor dear papa, though I suffered a good deal of annoyance then—but that, of course, I expected, and made up my mind for. When I was not nearly so old as you, my dear, there was a young gentleman who sat next us at church, who used, almost every Sunday, to cut my name in large letters in the front of his pew while the sermon was going on. It was gratifying, of course, naturally so, but still it was an annoyance, because the pew was in a very conspicuous place, and he was several times publicly taken out by the beadle for doing it. But that was nothing to this. This is a great deal worse, and a great deal more embarrassing. I would rather, Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby with great solemnity, and an effusion of tears—"I would rather, I declare, have been a pig-faced lady than be exposed to such a life as this!"

Frank Cheeryble and Tim Linkinwater looked, in irrepressible astonishment, first at each other, and then at Kate, who felt that some explanation was necessary, but who, between her terror at the apparition of the legs, her fear lest their owner should be smothered, and her anxiety to give the least ridiculous solution of the mystery that it was capable of bearing, was quite unable to utter a single word.

"He gives me great pain," continued Mrs. Nickleby, drying her eyes—"great pain; but don't hurt a hair of his head, I beg. On no account hurt a hair of his head."

It would not, under existing circumstances, have been quite so easy to hurt a hair of the gentleman's head as Mrs. Nickleby seemed to imagine, inasmuch as that part of his person was some feet up the chimney, which was by no means a wide one. But, as all this time he had never left off singing about the bankruptcy of the beautiful maid in respect of truth, and now

began not only to croak very feebly, but to kick with great violence, as if respiration became a task of difficulty, Frank Cheeryble, without further hesitation, pulled at the shorts and worsteds with such heartiness as to bring him floundering into the room with greater precipitation than he had quite calculated upon.

"Oh! yes, yes," said Kate, directly the whole figure of this singular visitor appeared in this abrupt manner. "I know who it is. Pray don't be rough with him. Is he hurt? I hope not. Oh, pray see if he is hurt!"

"He is not, I assure you," replied Frank, handling the object of his surprise, after this appeal, with sudden tenderness and respect. "He is not hurt in the least."

"Don't let him come any nearer," said Kate, retiring as far as she could.

"No, no, he shall not," rejoined Frank. "You see I have him secure here. But may I ask you what this means, and whether you expected this old gentleman?"

"Oh no!" said Kate, "of course not; but he—mamma does not think so, I believe—but he is a mad gentleman who has escaped from the next house, and must have found an opportunity of secreting himself here."

"Kate," interposed Mrs. Nickleby with severe dignity, "I am surprised at you."

"Dear mamma——" Kate gently remonstrated.

"I am surprised at you," repeated Mrs. Nickleby; "upon my word, Kate, I am quite astonished that you should join the persecutors of this unfortunate gentleman, when you know very well that they have the basest designs upon his property, and that that is the whole secret of it. It would be much kinder of you, Kate, to ask Mr. Linkinwater or Mr. Cheeryble to interfere in his behalf, and see him righted. You ought not to allow your feelings to influence you; it's not right—very far from it. What should my feelings be, do you suppose? If anybody ought to be indignant, who is it? I, of course, and very properly so. Still, at the same time, I wouldn't commit such an injustice for the world. No," continued Mrs. Nickleby, drawing herself up, and looking another way with a kind of bashful stateliness; "this gentleman will understand me when I tell him that I repeat the answer I gave him the other day—that I always will repeat it, though I do believe him to be sincere when I find him placing himself in such dreadful situations on my account—and that I request him to have the goodness to go away directly, or it will be impossible to keep his behaviour a secret from my son Nicholas. I am obliged to him, very much obliged to him, but I cannot listen to his addresses for a moment. It's quite impossible."

While this address was in course of delivery, the old gentleman, with his nose and cheeks embellished with large patches of soot, sat upon the ground with his arms folded, eyeing the spectators in profound silence, and with a very majestic demeanour. He did not appear to take the smallest notice of what Mrs. Nickleby said, but when she ceased to speak he honoured her with a long stare, and inquired if she had quite finished.

"I have nothing more to say," replied that lady modestly. "I really cannot say anything more."

"Very good," said the old gentleman, raising his voice, "then bring in the bottled lightning, a clean tumbler, and a cork-screw."

Nobody executing this order, the old gentleman, after a short pause, raised his voice again, and demanded a thunder sandwich. This article not being forthcoming either, he requested to be served with a fricassee of boot-tops and gold-fish sauce, and then, laughing heartily, gratified his hearers with a very long, very loud, and most melodious bellow.

But still Mrs. Nickleby, in reply to the significant looks of all about her, shook her head as though to assure them that she saw nothing whatever in all this, unless, indeed, it were a slight degree of eccentricity. She might have remained impressed with these opinions down to the latest moment of her life, but for a slight train of circumstances, which, trivial as they were, altered the whole complexion of the case.

It happened that Miss La Creevy, finding her patient in no very threatening condition, and being strongly impelled by curiosity to see what was going forward, bustled into the room while the old gentleman was in the very act of bellowing. It happened, too, that the instant the old gentleman saw her, he stopped short, skipped suddenly on his feet, and fell to kissing his hand violently: a change of demeanour which almost terrified the little portrait painter out of her senses, and caused her to retreat behind Tim Linkinwater with the utmost expedition.

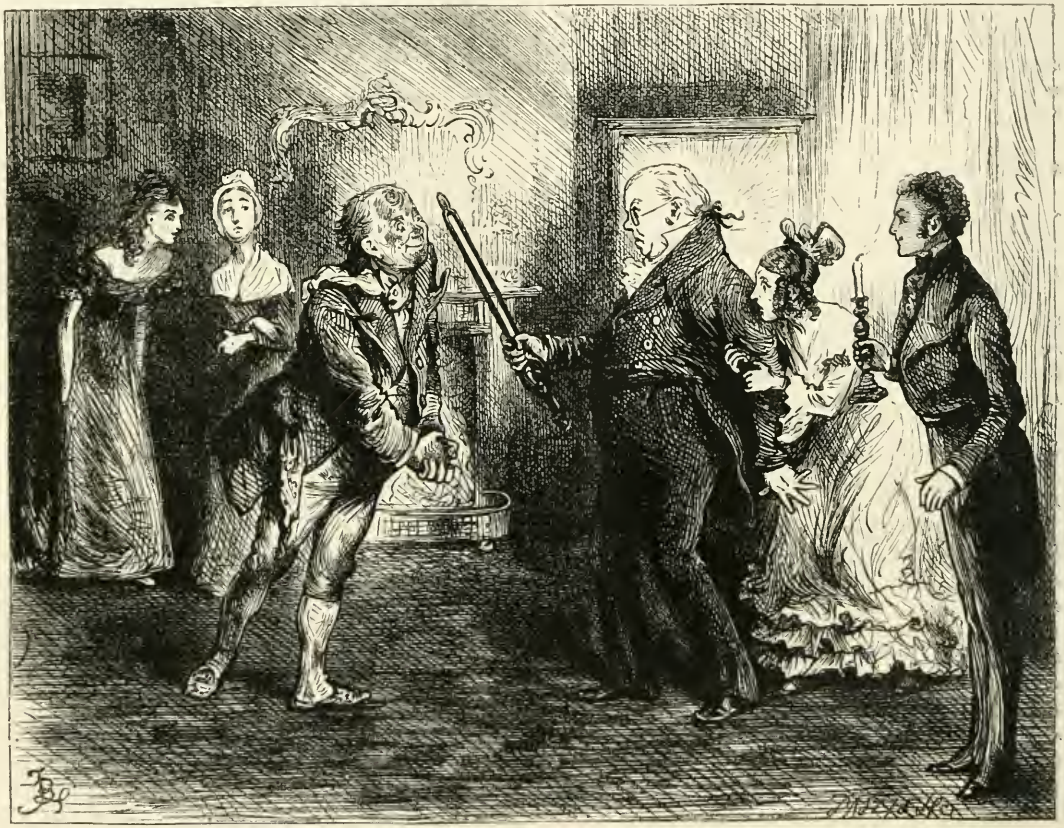
"Aha!" cried the old gentleman, folding his hands, and squeezing them with great force against each other. "I see her now; I see her now! My love, my life, my bride, my peerless beauty! She is come at last—at last—and all is gas and gaiters!"

Mrs. Nickleby looked rather disconcerted for a moment, but, immediately recovering, nodded to Miss La Creevy and the other spectators

several times, and frowned, and smiled gravely, giving them to understand that she saw where the mistake was, and would set it all to rights in a minute or two.

"She is come!" said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon his heart. "Cormoran and Blunderbore! She is come! All the wealth I have is hers, if she will take me for her slave. Where are grace, beauty, and blandishments like those? In the Empress of Madagascar? No. In the Queen of Diamonds? No. In Mrs. Rowland, who every morning bathes in Kalydor for nothing? No. Melt all these down into one, with the three Graces, the nine Muses, and fourteen biscuit bakers' daughters from Oxford Street, and make a woman half as lovely. Pho! I defy you."

After uttering this rhapsody, the old gentleman snapped his fingers twenty or thirty times, and then subsided into an ecstatic contempla-



"AHA!" CRIED THE OLD GENTLEMAN, FOLDING HIS HANDS, AND SQUEEZING THEM WITH GREAT FORCE AGAINST EACH OTHER. "I SEE HER NOW; I SEE HER NOW! MY LOVE, MY LIFE, MY BRIDE, MY PEERLESS BEAUTY! SHE IS COME AT LAST—AT LAST—AND ALL IS GAS AND GAITERS."

tion of Miss La Creevy's charms. This affording Mrs. Nickleby a favourable opportunity of explanation, she went about it straight.

"I am sure," said the worthy lady with a prefatory cough, "that it's a great relief, under such trying circumstances as these, to have anybody else mistaken for me—a very great relief; and it's a circumstance that never occurred before, although I have several times been mistaken for my daughter Kate. I have no doubt the people were very foolish, and perhaps ought to have known better, but still they did take me for her, and of course that was no fault of mine, and it would be very hard indeed if I was to be made responsible for it. However, in this instance, of course, I must feel that I should do exceedingly wrong if I suffered anybody—especially anybody that I am under great obligations to—to be made uncomfortable on my account, and therefore I think it my duty to tell that gentleman

that he is mistaken—that I am the lady who he was told by some impertinent person was niece to the Council of Paving-stones, and that I do beg and entreat of him to go quietly away, if it's only for"—here Mrs. Nickleby simpered and hesitated—"for *my* sake."

It might have been expected that the old gentleman would have been penetrated to the heart by the delicacy and condescension of this appeal, and that he would at least have returned a courteous and suitable reply. What, then, was the shock which Mrs. Nickleby received, when, accosting *her* in the most unmistakable manner, he replied in a loud and sonorous voice: "Avaunt! Cat!"

"Sir!" cried Mrs. Nickleby in a faint tone.

"Cat!" repeated the old gentleman. "Puss, Kit, Tit, Grimalkin, Tabby, Brindle—Whoosh!" with which last sound, uttered in a hissing manner between his teeth, the old gentleman swung his arms violently round and round, and at the same time alternately advanced on Mrs. Nickleby, and retreated from her, in that species of savage dance with which boys on market-days may be seen to frighten pigs, sheep, and other animals, when they give out obstinate indications of turning down a wrong street.

Mrs. Nickleby wasted no words, but uttered an exclamation of horror and surprise, and immediately fainted away.

"I'll attend to mamma," said Kate hastily. "I am not at all frightened. But pray take him away: pray take him away!"

Frank was not at all confident of his power of complying with this request, until he bethought himself of the stratagem of sending Miss La Creevy on a few paces in advance, and urging the old gentleman to follow her. It succeeded to a miracle; and he went away in a rapture of admiration, strongly guarded by Tim Linkinwater on one side, and Frank himself on the other.

"Kate," murmured Mrs. Nickleby, reviving when the coast was clear, "is he gone?"

She was assured that he was.

"I shall never forgive myself, Kate," said Mrs. Nickleby. "Never! That gentleman has lost his senses, and *I* am the unhappy cause."

"*You* the cause!" said Kate, greatly astonished.

"I, my love," replied Mrs. Nickleby with a desperate calmness. "You saw what he was the other day; you see what he is now. I told your brother, weeks and weeks ago, Kate, that I hoped a disappointment might not be too much for him. You see what a wreck he is. Making allowance for his being a little flighty, you know how rationally, and sensibly, and honourably he talked when we saw him in the garden. You have heard the dreadful nonsense he has been guilty of this night, and the manner in which he has gone on with that poor unfortunate little old maid. Can anybody doubt how all this has been brought about?"

"I should scarcely think they could," said Kate mildly.

"*I* should scarcely think so, either," rejoined her mother. "Well! if I am the unfortunate cause of this, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am not to blame. I told Nicholas—I said to him, 'Nicholas, my dear, we should be very careful how we proceed.' He would scarcely hear me. If the matter had only been properly taken up at first, as I wished it to be—— But you are both of you so like your poor papa. However, I have *my* consolation, and that should be enough for me!"

Washing her hands, thus, of all responsibility under this head, past, present, or to come, Mrs. Nickleby kindly added that she hoped her children might never have greater cause to reproach themselves than she had, and prepared herself to receive the escort, who soon returned with the intelligence that the old gentleman was safely housed, and that they found his custodians, who had been making merry with some friends, wholly ignorant of his absence.

Quiet being again restored, a delicious half-hour—so Frank called it in the course of subsequent conversation with Tim Linkinwater as they were walking home—a delicious half-hour was spent in conversation, and Tim's watch at length apprising him that it was high time to depart, the ladies were left alone, though not without many offers on the part of Frank to remain until Nicholas arrived, no matter what hour of the night it might be, if, after the late neighbourly irruption, they entertained the least fear of being left to themselves. As their freedom from all further apprehension, however, left no pretext for his insisting on mounting guard, he was obliged to abandon the citadel, and to retire with the trusty Tim.

Nearly three hours of silence passed away. Kate blushed to find, when Nicholas returned, how long she had been sitting alone, occupied with her own thoughts.

"I really thought it had not been half an hour," she said.

"They must have been pleasant thoughts, Kate," rejoined Nicholas gaily, "to make time pass away like that. What were they, now?"

Kate was confused; she toyed with some

trifle on the table—looked up and smiled—looked down and dropped a tear.

"Why, Kate," said Nicholas, drawing his sister towards him and kissing her, "let me see your face. No? Ah! that was but a glimpse; that's scarcely fair. A longer look than that, Kate. Come—and I'll read your thoughts for you."

There was something in this proposition, albeit it was said without the slightest consciousness or application, which so alarmed his sister, that Nicholas laughingly changed the subject to domestic matters, and thus gathered, by degrees, as they left the room and went up-stairs together, how lonely Smike had been all night—and by very slow degrees, too; for on this subject, also, Kate seemed to speak with some reluctance.

"Poor fellow!" said Nicholas, tapping gently at his door, "what can be the cause of all this?"

Kate was hanging on her brother's arm. The door being quickly opened, she had not time to disengage herself, before Smike, very pale and haggard, and completely dressed, confronted them.

"And have you not been to bed?" said Nicholas.

"N—n—no," was the reply.

Nicholas gently detained his sister, who made an effort to retire; and asked, "Why not?"

"I could not sleep," said Smike, grasping the hand which his friend extended to him.

"You are not well?" rejoined Nicholas.

"I am better, indeed—a great deal better," said Smike quickly.

"Then why do you give way to these fits of melancholy?" inquired Nicholas in his kindest manner; "or why not tell us the cause? You grow a different creature, Smike."

"I do; I know I do," he replied. "I will tell you the reason one day, but not now. I hate myself for this; you are all so good and kind. But I cannot help it. My heart is very full; you do not know how full it is."

He wrung Nicholas's hand before he released it; and glancing, for a moment, at the brother and sister as they stood together, as if there were something in their strong affection which touched him very deeply, withdrew into his chamber, and was soon the only watcher under that quiet roof.

CHAPTER L.

INVOLVES A SERIOUS CATASTROPHE.

THE little race-course at Hampton was in the full tide and height of its gaiety; the day as dazzling as day could be; the sun high in the cloudless sky, and shining in its fullest splendour. Every gaudy colour that fluttered in the air, from carriage seat and garish tent top, shone out in its gaudiest hues. Old dingy flags grew new again, faded gilding was re-burnished, stained rotten canvas looked a snowy white, the very beggars' rags were freshened up, and sentiment quite forgot its charity in its fervent admiration of poverty so picturesque.

It was one of those scenes of life and animation, caught in its very brightest and freshest moments, which can scarcely fail to please; for if the eye be tired of show and glare, or the ear be weary with a ceaseless round of noise, the one may repose, turn almost where it will, on eager, happy, and expectant faces, and the other deaden all consciousness of more annoying sounds in those of mirth and exhilaration. Even the sunburnt faces of gipsy children, half naked though they be, suggest a drop of comfort. It is a pleasant thing to see that the sun has been there; to know that the air and light are on them every day; to feel that they *are* children, and lead children's lives; that if their pillows be damp, it is with the dews of Heaven, and not with tears; that the limbs of their girls are free, and that they are not crippled by distortions, imposing an unnatural and horrible penance upon their sex; that their lives are spent, from day to day, at least among the waving trees, and not in the midst of dreadful engines which make young children old before they know what childhood is, and give them the exhaustion and infirmity of age, without, like age, the privilege to die. God send that old nursery tales were true, and that gipsies stole such children by the score!

The great race of the day had just been run; and the close lines of people, on either side of the course, suddenly breaking up and pouring into it, imparted a new liveliness to the scene, which was again all busy movement. Some hurried eagerly to catch a glimpse of the winning horse; others darted to and fro, searching, no less eagerly, for the carriages they had left in quest of better stations. Here, a little knot gathered round a pea-and-thimble table to watch the plucking of some unhappy greenhorn; and

there, another proprietor with his confederates in various disguises—one man in spectacles; another, with an eye-glass and a stylish hat; a third, dressed as a farmer well to do in the world, with his top-coat over his arm, and his flash notes in a large leathern pocket-book; and all with heavy-handled whips, to represent most innocent country fellows who had trotted there on horseback—sought, by loud and noisy talk and pretended play, to entrap some unwary customer, while the gentlemen confederates (of more villainous aspect still, in clean linen and good clothes) betrayed their close interest in the concern by the anxious furtive glance they cast on all new-comers. These would be hanging on the outskirts of a wide circle of people assembled round some itinerant juggler, opposed, in his turn, by a noisy band of music, or the classic game of "Ring the Bull," while ventriloquists holding dialogues with wooden dolls, and fortune-telling women smothering the cries of real babies, divided with them, and many more, the general attention of the company. Drinking-tents were full, glasses began to clink in carriages, hampers to be unpacked, tempting provisions to be set forth, knives and forks to rattle, champagne corks to fly, eyes to brighten that were not dull before, and pickpockets to count their gains during the last heat. The attention so recently strained on one object of interest was now divided among a hundred; and, look where you would, there was a motley assemblage of feasting, laughing, talking, begging, gambling, and mummery.

Of the gambling booths there was a plentiful show, flourishing in all the splendour of carpeted ground, striped hangings, crimson cloth, pinnacled roofs, geranium pots, and livery servants. There were the Stranger's Club-house, the Athenæum Club-house, the Hampton Club-house, the St. James's Club-house, and half a mile of club-houses to play *in;* and there were *rouge-et-noir*, French hazard, and other games to play *at.* It is into one of these booths that our story takes its way.

Fitted up with three tables for the purposes of play, and crowded with players and lookers-on, it was—although the largest place of the kind upon the course—intensely hot, notwithstanding that a portion of the canvas roof was rolled back to admit more air, and there were two doors for a free passage in and out. Excepting one or two men who—each with a long roll of half-crowns, chequered with a few stray sovereigns, in his left hand—staked their money at every roll of the ball with a business-like sedateness which showed that they were used to it, and had been playing all day, and most probably all the day before, there was no very distinctive character about the players, who were chiefly young men, apparently attracted by curiosity, or staking small sums as part of the amusement of the day, with no very great interest in winning or losing. There were two persons present, however, who, as peculiarly good specimens of a class, deserve a passing notice.

Of these, one was a man of six or eight and fifty, who sat on a chair near one of the entrances of the booth, with his hands folded on the top of his stick, and his chin appearing above them. He was a tall, fat, long-bodied man, buttoned up to the throat in a light green coat, which made his body look still longer than it was: and wore, besides, drab breeches and gaiters, a white neckerchief, and a broad-brimmed white hat. Amid all the buzzing noise of the games, and the perpetual passing in and out of the people, he seemed perfectly calm and abstracted, without the smallest particle of excitement in his composition. He exhibited no indication of weariness, nor, to a casual observer, of interest either. There he sat, quite still and collected. Sometimes, but very rarely, he nodded to some passing face, or beckoned to a waiter to obey a call from one of the tables. The next instant he subsided into his old state. He might have been some profoundly deaf old gentleman, who had come in to take a rest, or he might have been patiently waiting for a friend, without the least consciousness of anybody's presence, or fixed in a trance, or under the influence of opium. People turned round and looked at him; he made no gesture, caught nobody's eye, —let them pass away, and others come on and be succeeded by others, and took no notice. When he did move, it seemed wonderful how he could have seen anything to occasion it. And so, in truth, it was. But there was not a face that passed in or out, which this man failed to see; not a gesture at any one of the three tables that was lost upon him; not a word spoken by the bankers but reached his ear; not a winner or loser he could not have marked; and he was the proprietor of the place.

The other presided over the *rouge-et-noir* table. He was probably some ten years younger, and was a plump, paunchy, sturdy-looking fellow, with his under lip a little pursed, from a habit of counting money inwardly as he paid it, but with no decidedly bad expression in his face, which was rather an honest and jolly one than otherwise. He wore no coat, the weather being hot, and stood behind the table with a huge mound of crowns and half-crowns before him,

and a cash-box for notes. This game was constantly playing. Perhaps twenty people would be staking at the same time. This man had to roll the ball, to watch the stakes as they were laid down, to gather them off the colour which lost, to pay those who won, to do it all with the utmost dispatch, to roll the ball again, and to keep this game perpetually alive. He did it all with a rapidity absolutely marvellous; never hesitating, never making a mistake, never stopping, and never ceasing to repeat such unconnected phrases as the following, which, partly from habit, and partly to have something appropriate and business-like to say, he constantly poured out with the same monotonous emphasis, and in nearly the same order, all day long:—

"Rooge-a-nore from Paris! Gentlemen, make your game and back your own opinions—any time while the ball rolls—rooge-a-nore from Paris, gentlemen, it's a French game, gentlemen, I brought it over myself, I did indeed!—rooge-a-nore from Paris—black wins—black—stop a minute, sir, and I'll pay you directly—two there, half a pound there, three there—and one there—gentlemen, the ball's a rolling—any time, sir, while the ball rolls!—the beauty of this game is, that you can double your stakes or put down your money, gentlemen, any time while the ball rolls—black again—black wins—I never saw such a thing—I never did, in all my life, upon my word I never did; if any gentleman had been backing the black in the last five minutes he must have won five-and-forty pound in four rolls of the ball, he must indeed—Gentlemen, we've port, sherry, cigars, and most excellent champagne. Here, wai-ter, bring a bottle of champagne, and let's have a dozen or fifteen cigars here—and let's be comfortable, gentlemen—and bring some clean glasses—any time while the ball rolls!—I lost one hundred and thirty-seven pound yesterday, gentlemen, at one roll of the ball, I did indeed!—how do you do, sir?" (recognising some knowing gentleman without any halt or change of voice, and giving a wink so slight that it seems an accident), "will you take a glass of sherry, sir?—here, wai-ter! bring a clean glass, and hand the sherry to this gentleman—and hand it round, will you, waiter?—this is the rooge-a-nore from Paris, gentlemen—any time while the ball rolls!—gentlemen, make your game, and back your own opinions—it's the rooge-a-nore from Paris—quite a new game, I brought it over myself, I did indeed—gentlemen, the ball's a rolling!"

This officer was busily plying his vocation when half-a-dozen persons sauntered through the booth, to whom—but without stopping either in his speech or work—he bowed respectfully; at the same time directing, by a look, the attention of a man beside him to the tallest figure in the group, in recognition of whom the proprietor pulled off his hat. This was Sir Mulberry Hawk, with whom were his friend and pupil, and a small train of gentlemanly-dressed men, of characters more doubtful than obscure.

The proprietor, in a low voice, bade Sir Mulberry good day. Sir Mulberry, in the same tone, bade the proprietor go to the devil, and turned to speak with his friends.

There was evidently an irritable consciousness about him that he was an object of curiosity, on this first occasion of showing himself in public after the accident that had befallen him; and it was easy to perceive that he appeared on the race-course, that day, more in the hope of meeting with a great many people who knew him, and so getting over as much as possible of the annoyance at once, than with any purpose of enjoying the sport. There yet remained a slight scar upon his face, and whenever he was recognised, as he was almost every minute by people sauntering in and out, he made a restless effort to conceal it with his glove; showing how keenly he felt the disgrace he had undergone.

"Ah! Hawk," said one very sprucely-dressed personage in a Newmarket coat, a choice neckerchief, and all other accessories of the most unexceptionable kind. "How d'ye do, old fellow?"

This was a rival trainer of young noblemen and gentlemen, and the person of all others whom Sir Mulberry most hated and dreaded to meet. They shook hands with excessive cordiality.

"And how are you now, old fellow, hey?"

"Quite well, quite well," said Sir Mulberry.

"That's right," said the other. "How d'ye do, Verisopht? He's a little pulled down, our friend here—rather out of condition still, hey?"

It should be observed that the gentleman had very white teeth, and that, when there was no excuse for laughing, he generally finished with the same monosyllable, which he uttered so as to display them.

"He's in very good condition; there's nothing the matter with him," said the young man carelessly.

"Upon my soul I'm glad to hear it," rejoined the other. "Have you just returned from Brussels?"

"We only reached town late last night," said

Lord Frederick. Sir Mulberry turned away to speak to one of his own party, and feigned not to hear.

"Now, upon my life," said the friend, affecting to speak in a whisper, "it's an uncommonly bold and game thing in Hawk to show himself so soon. I say it advisedly; there's a vast deal of courage in it. You see he has just rusticated long enough to excite curiosity, and not long enough for men to have forgotten that deuced unpleasant—— By-the-bye—you know the rights of the affair, of course? Why did you never give those confounded papers the lie? I seldom read the papers, but I looked in the papers for that, and may I be——"

"Look in the papers," interrupted Sir Mulberry, turning suddenly round, "to-morrow—no, next day, will you?"

"Upon my life, my dear fellow, I seldom or never read the papers," said the other, shrugging his shoulders, "but I will, at your recommendation. What shall I look for?"

"Good day," said Sir Mulberry, turning abruptly on his heel, and drawing his pupil with him. Falling, again, into the loitering, careless pace at which they had entered, they lounged out arm-in-arm.

"I won't give him a case of murder to read," muttered Sir Mulberry with an oath; "but it shall be something very near it, if whip-cord cuts and bludgeons bruise."

His companion said nothing, but there was something in his manner which galled Sir Mulberry to add, with nearly as much ferocity as if his friend had been Nicholas himself:

"I sent Jenkins to old Nickleby before eight o'clock this morning. He's a staunch one; he was back with me before the messenger. I had it all from him in the first five minutes. I know where this hound is to be met with—time and place both. But there's no need to talk; to-morrow will soon be here."

"And wha-at's to be done to-morrow?" inquired Lord Frederick.

Sir Mulberry Hawk honoured him with an angry glance, but condescended to return no verbal answer to this inquiry. Both walked sullenly on, as though their thoughts were busily occupied, until they were quite clear of the crowd, and almost alone, when Sir Mulberry wheeled round to return.

"Stop," said his companion; "I want to speak to you—in earnest. Don't turn back. Let us walk here a few minutes."

"What have you to say to me, that you could not say yonder as well as here?" returned his Mentor, disengaging his arm.

"Hawk," rejoined the other, "tell me; I must know——"

"*Must* know!" interrupted the other disdainfully. "Whew! Go on. If you must know, of course there's no escape for me. Must know!"

"Must ask, then," returned Lord Frederick, "and must press you for a plain and straightforward answer—is what you have just said only a mere whim of the moment, occasioned by your being out of humour and irritated, or is it your serious intention, and one that you have actually contemplated?"

"Why, don't you remember what passed on the subject one night, when I was laid up with a broken limb?" said Sir Mulberry with a sneer.

"Perfectly well."

"Then take that for an answer, in the devil's name," replied Sir Mulberry, "and ask me for no other."

Such was the ascendancy he had acquired over his dupe, and such the latter's general habit of submission, that, for the moment, the young man seemed half afraid to pursue the subject. He soon overcame this feeling, however, if it had restrained him at all, and retorted angrily:

"If I remember what passed at the time you speak of, I expressed a strong opinion on this subject, and said that, with my knowledge or consent, you never should do what you threaten now."

"Will you prevent me?" asked Sir Mulberry with a laugh.

"Ye-es, if I can," returned the other promptly.

"A very proper saving clause, that last," said Sir Mulberry; "and one you stand in need of. Oh! look to your own business, and leave me to look to mine."

"This *is* mine," retorted Lord Frederick. "I make it mine; I will make it mine. It's mine already. I am more compromised than I should be, as it is."

"Do as you please, and what you please, for yourself," said Sir Mulberry, affecting an easy good-humour. "Surely that must content you! Do nothing for me; that's all. I advise no man to interfere in proceedings that I choose to take. I am sure you know me better than to do so. The fact is, I see, you mean to offer me advice. It is well meant, I have no doubt, but I reject it. Now, if you please, we will return to the carriage. I find no entertainment here, but quite the reverse. If we prolong this conversation, we might quarrel, which would be no proof of wisdom in either you or me."

With this rejoinder, and waiting for no further discussion, Sir Mulberry Hawk yawned, and very leisurely turned back.

There was not a little tact and knowledge of

the young lord's disposition in this mode of treating him. Sir Mulberry clearly saw that, if his dominion were to last, it must be established now. He knew that, the moment he became violent, the young man would become violent too. He had, many times, been enabled to strengthen his influence, when any circumstance had occurred to weaken it, by adopting this cool and laconic style; and he trusted to it now, with very little doubt of its entire success.

But while he did this, and wore the most careless and indifferent deportment that his practised arts enabled him to assume, he inwardly resolved, not only to visit all the mortification of being compelled to suppress his feelings with additional severity upon Nicholas, but also to make the young lord pay dearly for it, one day, in some shape or other. So long as he had been a passive instrument in his hands, Sir Mulberry had regarded him with no other feeling than contempt; but, now that he presumed to avow opinions in opposition to his, and even to turn upon him with a lofty tone and an air of superiority, he began to hate him. Conscious that, in the vilest and most worthless sense of the term, he was dependent upon the weak young lord, Sir Mulberry could the less brook humiliation at his hands; and, when he began to dislike him, he measured his dislike—as men often do—by the extent of the injuries he had inflicted upon its object. When it is remembered that Sir Mulberry Hawk had plundered, duped, deceived, and fooled his pupil in every possible way, it will not be wondered at that, beginning to hate him, he began to hate him cordially.

On the other hand, the young lord having thought—which he very seldom did about anything—and seriously too, upon the affair with Nicholas, and the circumstances which led to it, had arrived at a manly and honest conclusion. Sir Mulberry's coarse and insulting behaviour on the occasion in question had produced a deep impression on his mind; a strong suspicion of his having led him on to pursue Miss Nickleby for purposes of his own, had been lurking there for some time; he was really ashamed of his share in the transaction, and deeply mortified by the misgiving that he had been gulled. He had had sufficient leisure to reflect upon these things during their late retirement; and at times, when his careless and indolent nature would permit, had availed himself of the opportunity. Slight circumstances, too, had occurred to increase his suspicion. It wanted but a very slight circumstance to kindle his wrath against Sir Mulberry. This his disdainful and insolent tone in their recent conversation (the only one they had held upon the subject since the period to which Sir Mulberry referred) effected.

Thus they rejoined their friends: each with causes of dislike against the other rankling in his breast: and the young man haunted, besides, with thoughts of the vindictive retaliation which was threatened against Nicholas, and the determination to prevent it by some strong step, if possible. But this was not all. Sir Mulberry, conceiving that he had silenced him effectually, could not suppress his triumph, or forbear from following up what he conceived to be his advantage. Mr. Pyke was there, and Mr. Pluck was there, and Colonel Chowser, and other gentlemen of the same caste, and it was a great point for Sir Mulberry to show them that he had not lost his influence. At first the young lord contented himself with a silent determination to take measures for withdrawing himself from the connection immediately. By degrees he grew more angry, and was exasperated by jests and familiarities which, a few hours before, would have been a source of amusement to him. This did not serve him; for, at such bantering or retort as suited the company, he was no match for Sir Mulberry. Still no violent rupture took place. They returned to town; Messrs Pyke and Pluck and other gentlemen frequently protesting, on the way thither, that Sir Mulberry had never been in such tiptop spirits in all his life.

They dined together sumptuously. The wine flowed freely, as, indeed, it had done all day. Sir Mulberry drank to recompense himself for his recent abstinence; the young lord, to drown his indignation; and the remainder of the party, because the wine was of the best, and they had nothing to pay. It was nearly midnight when they rushed out, wild, burning with wine, their blood boiling, and their brains on fire, to the gaming-table.

Here they encountered another party, mad like themselves. The excitement of play, hot rooms, and glaring lights was not calculated to allay the fever of the time. In that giddy whirl of noise and confusion the men were delirious. Who thought of money, ruin, or the morrow, in the savage intoxication of the moment? More wine was called for, glass after glass was drained, their parched and scalding mouths were cracked with thirst. Down poured the wine like oil on blazing fire. And still the riot went on. The debauchery gained its height; glasses were dashed upon the floor by hands that could not carry them to lips; oaths were shouted out by lips which could scarcely form the words to vent them in; drunken losers cursed and roared; some mounted on the tables, waving bottles above

their heads, and bidding defiance to the rest; some danced, some sang, some tore the cards and raved. Tumult and frenzy reigned supreme; when a noise arose that drowned all others, and two men, seizing each other by the throat, struggled into the middle of the room.

A dozen voices, until now unheard, called aloud to part them. Those who had kept themselves cool to win, and who earned their living in such scenes, threw themselves upon the combatants, and, forcing them asunder, dragged them some space apart.

"Let me go!" cried Sir Mulberry in a thick hoarse voice. "He struck me! Do you hear? I say he struck me. Have I a friend here? Who is this? Westwood. Do you hear me say he struck me?"

"I hear, I hear," replied one of those who held him. "Come away for to-night!"

"I will not, by G—!" he replied. "A dozen men about us saw the blow."

"To-morrow will be ample time," said the friend.

"It will not be ample time!" cried Sir Mulberry. "To-night—at once—here!" His passion was so great, that he could not articulate, but stood clenching his fist, tearing his hair, and stamping upon the ground.

"What is this, my lord?" said one of those who surrounded him. "Have blows passed?"

"*One* blow has," was the panting reply. "I struck him—I proclaim it to all here! I struck him, and he knows why. I say, with him, let this quarrel be adjusted now. Captain Adams," said the young lord, looking hurriedly about him, and addressing one of those who had interposed, "let me speak with you, I beg."

The person addressed stepped forward, and, taking the young man's arm, they retired together, followed shortly afterwards by Sir Mulberry and his friend.

It was a profligate haunt, of the worst repute, and not a place in which such an affair was likely to awaken any sympathy for either party, or to call forth any further remonstrance or interposition. Elsewhere, its further progress would have been instantly prevented, and time allowed for sober and cool reflection; but not there. Disturbed in their orgies, the party broke up; some reeled away with looks of tipsy gravity; others withdrew noisily discussing what had just occurred; the gentlemen of honour who lived upon their winnings remarked to each other, as they went out, that Hawk was a good shot; and those who had been most noisy fell fast asleep upon the sofas, and thought no more about it.

Meanwhile, the two seconds, as they may be called now, after a long conference, each with his principal, met together in another room. Both utterly heartless, both men upon town, both thoroughly initiated in its worst vices, both deeply in debt, both fallen from some higher estate, both addicted to every depravity for which society can find some genteel name, and plead its most depraving conventionalities as an excuse, they were naturally gentlemen of most unblemished honour themselves, and of great nicety concerning the honour of other people.

These two gentlemen were unusually cheerful just now; for the affair was pretty certain to make some noise, and could scarcely fail to enhance their reputations.

"This is an awkward affair, Adams," said Mr. Westwood, drawing himself up.

"Very," returned the captain; "a blow has been struck, and there is but one course, *of* course."

"No apology, I suppose?" said Mr. Westwood.

"Not a syllable, sir, from my man, if we talk till doomsday," returned the captain. "The original cause of dispute, I understand, was some girl or other, to whom your principal applied certain terms, which Lord Frederick, defending the girl, repelled. But this led to a long recrimination upon a great many sore subjects, charges, and counter-charges. Sir Mulberry was sarcastic; Lord Frederick was excited, and struck him in the heat of provocation, and under circumstances of great aggravation. That blow, unless there is a full retraction on the part of Sir Mulberry, Lord Frederick is ready to justify."

"There is no more to be said," returned the other, "but to settle the hour and the place of meeting. It's a responsibility; but there is a strong feeling to have it over. Do you object to say at sunrise?"

"Sharp work," replied the captain, referring to his watch. "However, as this seems to have been a long time breeding, and negotiation is only a waste of words—no."

"Something may possibly be said out of doors, after what passed in the other room, which renders it desirable that we should be off without delay, and quite clear of town," said Mr. Westwood. "What do you say to one of the meadows opposite Twickenham, by the riverside?"

The captain saw no objection.

"Shall we join company in the avenue of trees which leads from Petersham to Ham House, and settle the exact spot when we arrive there?" said Mr. Westwood.

To this the captain also assented. After a few other preliminaries, equally brief—and having settled the road each party should take to avoid suspicion—they separated.

"We shall just have comfortable time, my lord," said the captain when he had communicated the arrangements, "to call at my rooms for a case of pistols, and then jog coolly down. If you will allow me to dismiss your servant, we'll take my cab; for yours, perhaps, might be recognised."

What a contrast, when they reached the street, to the scene they had just left! It was already daybreak. For the flaring yellow light within was substituted the clear, bright, glorious morning; for a hot, close atmosphere, tainted with the smell of expiring lamps, and reeking with the steams of riot and dissipation, the free, fresh, wholesome air. But, to the fevered head on which that cool air blew, it seemed to come laden with remorse for time misspent and countless opportunities neglected. With throbbing veins and burning skin, eyes wild and heavy, thoughts hurried and disordered, he felt as

"TWO MEN, SEIZING EACH OTHER BY THE THROAT, STRUGGLED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM."

though the light were a reproach, and shrunk involuntarily from the day as if he were some foul and hideous thing.

"Shivering?" said the captain. "You are cold."

"Rather."

"It does strike cool coming out of those hot rooms. Wrap that cloak about you. So, so; now we're off."

They rattled through the quiet streets, made their call at the captain's lodgings, cleared the town, and emerged upon the open road without hindrance or molestation.

Fields, trees, gardens, hedges, everything looked very beautiful; the young man scarcely seemed to have noticed them before, though he had passed the same objects a thousand times. There was a peace and serenity upon them all, strangely at variance with the bewilderment and confusion of his own half-sobered thoughts, and yet impressive and welcome. He had no fear upon his mind; but, as he looked about him, he had less anger; and, though all old delusions relative to his worthless late companion were now cleared away, he rather wished he had never known him than thought of its having come to this.

"ALL THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF DAY CAME ON; AND AMIDST IT ALL, AND PRESSING DOWN THE GRASS WHOSE EVERY BLADE BORE TWENTY TINY LIVES, LAY THE DEAD MAN, WITH HIS STARK AND RIGID FACE TURNED UPWARDS TO THE SKY."—P. 337

The past night, the day before, and many other days and nights beside, all mingled themselves up in one unintelligible and senseless whirl; he could not separate the transactions of one time from those of another. Now, the noise of the wheels resolved itself into some wild tune in which he could recognise scraps of airs he knew; now, there was nothing in his ears but a stunning and bewildering sound, like rushing water. But his companion rallied him on being so silent, and they talked and laughed boisterously. When they stopped he was a little surprised to find himself in the act of smoking; but, on reflection, he remembered when and where he had taken the cigar.

They stopped at the avenue gate and alighted, leaving the carriage to the care of the servant, who was a smart fellow, and nearly as well accustomed to such proceedings as his master. Sir Mulberry and his friend were already there. All four walked in profound silence up the aisle of stately elm-trees, which, meeting far above their heads, formed a long green perspective of Gothic arches, terminating, like some old ruin, in the open sky.

After a pause, and a brief conference between the seconds, they at length turned to the right, and, taking a track across a little meadow, passed Ham House, and came into some fields beyond. In one of these they stopped. The ground was measured, some usual forms gone through, the two principals were placed front to front at the distance agreed upon, and Sir Mulberry turned his face towards his young adversary for the first time. He was very pale—his eyes were bloodshot, his dress disordered, and his hair dishevelled,—all, most probably, the consequences of the previous day and night. For the face, it expressed nothing but violent and evil passions. He shaded his eyes with his hand; gazed at his opponent steadfastly for a few moments; and then, taking the weapon which was tendered to him, bent his eyes upon that, and looked up no more until the word was given, when he instantly fired.

The two shots were fired, as nearly as possible, at the same instant. In that instant the young lord turned his head sharply round, fixed upon his adversary a ghastly stare, and, without a groan or stagger, fell down dead.

"He's gone!" cried Westwood, who, with the other second, had run up to the body, and fallen on one knee beside it.

"His blood on his own head," said Sir Mulberry. "He brought this upon himself, and forced it upon me."

"Captain Adams," cried Westwood hastily, "I call you to witness that this was fairly done. Hawk, we have not a moment to lose. We must leave this place immediately, push for Brighton, and cross to France with all speed. This has been a bad business, and may be worse, if we delay a moment. Adams, consult your own safety, and don't remain here; the living before the dead. Good-bye!"

With these words, he seized Sir Mulberry by the arm, and hurried him away. Captain Adams—only pausing to convince himself, beyond all question, of the fatal result—sped off in the same direction, to concert measures with his servant for removing the body, and securing his own safety likewise.

So died Lord Frederick Verisopht, by the hand which he had loaded with gifts, and clasped a thousand times; by the act of him, but for whom, and others like him, he might have lived a happy man, and died with children's faces round his bed.

The sun came proudly up in all his majesty, the noble river ran its winding course, the leaves quivered and rustled in the air, the birds poured their cheerful songs from every tree, the short-lived butterfly fluttered its little wings; all the light and life of day came on; and amidst it all, and pressing down the grass whose every blade bore twenty tiny lives, lay the dead man, with his stark and rigid face turned upwards to the sky.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PROJECT OF MR. RALPH NICKLEBY AND HIS FRIEND, APPROACHING A SUCCESSFUL ISSUE, BECOMES UNEXPECTEDLY KNOWN TO ANOTHER PARTY NOT ADMITTED INTO THEIR CONFIDENCE.

IN an old house, dismal, dark, and dusty, which seemed to have withered, like himself, and to have grown yellow and shrivelled in hoarding him from the light of day, as he had in hoarding his money, lived Arthur Gride. Meagre old chairs and tables, of spare and bony make, and hard and cold as misers' hearts, were ranged, in grim array, against the gloomy walls; attenuated presses, grown lank and lantern-jawed in guarding the treasures they enclosed, and tottering as though from constant fear and dread of thieves, shrunk up in dark corners, whence they cast no shadows on the ground, and seemed to hide and cower from observation. A tall grim clock upon the stairs, with long lean hands and famished face, ticked

in cautious whispers; and when it struck the time, in thin and piping sounds, like an old man's voice, rattled as if it were pinched with hunger.

No fireside couch was there to invite repose and comfort. Elbow-chairs there were, but they looked uneasy in their minds, cocked their arms suspiciously and timidly, and kept upon their guard. Others were fantastically grim and gaunt, as having drawn themselves up to their utmost height, and put on their fiercest looks to stare all comers out of countenance. Others, again, knocked up against their neighbours, or leant for support against the wall—somewhat ostentatiously, as if to call all men to witness that they were not worth the taking. The dark square lumbering bedsteads seemed built for restless dreams; the musty hangings seemed to creep in scanty folds together, whispering among themselves, when rustled by the wind, their trembling knowledge of the tempting wares that lurked within the dark and tight-locked closets.

From out the most spare and hungry room in all this spare and hungry house there came, one morning, the tremulous tones of old Gride's voice, as it feebly chirruped forth the fag-end of some forgotten song, of which the burden ran:

> "Ta—ran—tan—too,
> Throw the old shoe,
> And may the wedding be lucky!"

which he repeated, in the same shrill quavering notes, again and again, until a violent fit of coughing obliged him to desist, and to pursue, in silence, the occupation upon which he was engaged.

This occupation was, to take down from the shelves of a worm-eaten wardrobe a quantity of frouzy garments one by one; to subject each to a careful and minute inspection by holding it up against the light, and, after folding it with great exactness, to lay it on one or other of two little heaps beside him. He never took two articles of clothing out together, but always brought them forth singly: and never failed to shut the wardrobe door, and turn the key, between each visit to its shelves.

"The snuff-coloured suit," said Arthur Gride, surveying a threadbare coat. "Did I look well in snuff colour? Let me think."

The result of his cogitations appeared to be unfavourable, for he folded the garment once more, laid it aside, and mounted on a chair to get down another: chirping while he did so:

> "Young, loving, and fair,
> Oh, what happiness there!
> The wedding is sure to be lucky!"

"They always put in 'young,'" said old Arthur, "but songs are only written for the sake of rhyme, and this is a silly one that the poor country-people sang when I was a little boy. Though stop—young is quite right too—it means the bride—yes. He, he, he! It means the bride. Oh dear, that's good! That's very good. And true besides—quite true!"

In the satisfaction of this discovery, he went over the verse again with increased expression, and a shake or two here and there. He then resumed his employment.

"The bottle-green," said old Arthur; "the bottle-green was a famous suit to wear, and I bought it very cheap at a pawnbroker's, and there was—he, he, he!—a tarnished shilling in the waistcoat pocket. To think that the pawnbroker shouldn't have known there was a shilling in it! *I* knew it! I felt it when I was examining the quality. Oh, what a dull dog! It was a lucky suit, too, this bottle-green. The very day I put it on first, old Lord Mallowford was burnt to death in his bed, and all the post-obits fell in. I'll be married in the bottle-green. Peg—Peg Sliderskew—I'll wear the bottle-green!"

This call, loudly repeated twice or thrice at the room-door, brought into the apartment a short, thin, weazen, blear-eyed old woman, palsy-stricken and hideously ugly, who, wiping her shrivelled face upon her dirty apron, inquired, in that subdued tone in which deaf people commonly speak:—

"Was that you a calling, or only the clock a striking? My hearing gets so bad, I never know which is which; but, when I hear a noise, I know it must be one of you, because nothing else never stirs in the house."

"Me, Peg—me," said Arthur Gride, tapping himself on the breast to render the reply more intelligible.

"You, eh?" returned Peg. "And what do *you* want?"

"I'll be married in the bottle-green," cried Arthur Gride.

"It's a deal too good to be married in, master," rejoined Peg after a short inspection of the suit. "Haven't you got anything worse than this?"

"Nothing that'll do," replied old Arthur.

"Why not do?" retorted Peg. "Why don't you wear your every-day clothes, like a man—eh?"

"They an't becoming enough, Peg," returned her master.

"Not what enough?" said Peg.

"Becoming."

"Becoming what?" said Peg sharply. "Not becoming too old to wear?"

Arthur Gride muttered an imprecation on his housekeeper's deafness, as he roared in her ear:

"Not smart enough! I want to look as well as I can."

"Look!" cried Peg. "If she's as handsome as you say she is, she won't look much at you, master, take your oath of that; and as to how you look yourself—pepper-and-salt, bottle-green, sky-blue, or tartan-plaid will make no difference in you."

With which consolatory assurance, Peg Sliderskew gathered up the chosen suit, and, folding her skinny arms upon the bundle, stood mouthing, and grinning, and blinking her watery eyes, like an uncouth figure in some monstrous piece of carving.

"You're in a funny humour, an't you, Peg?" said Arthur with not the best possible grace.

"Why, isn't it enough to make me?" rejoined the old woman. "I shall soon enough be put out, though, if anybody tries to domineer it over me: and so I give you notice, master. Nobody shall be put over Peg Sliderskew's head, after so many years; you know that, and so I needn't tell you! That won't do for me—no, no, nor for you. Try that once, and come to ruin—ruin—ruin!"

"Oh dear, dear, I shall never try it," said Arthur Gride, appalled by the mention of the word, "not for the world! It would be very easy to ruin me; we must be very careful; more saving than ever, with another mouth to feed. Only we—we mustn't let her lose her good looks, Peg, because I like to see 'em."

"Take care you don't find good looks come expensive," returned Peg, shaking her forefinger.

"But she can earn money herself, Peg," said Arthur Gride, eagerly watching what effect his communication produced upon the old woman's countenance: "she can draw, paint, work all manner of pretty things for ornamenting stools and chairs: slippers, Peg, watch-guards, hair chains, and a thousand little dainty trifles that I couldn't give you half the names of. Then she can play the piano (and what's more, she's got one), and sing like a little bird. She'll be very cheap to dress and keep, Peg; don't you think she will?"

"If you don't let her make a fool of you, she may," returned Peg.

"A fool of *me!*" exclaimed Arthur. "Trust your old master not to be fooled by pretty faces, Peg; no, no, no—nor by ugly ones neither, Mrs. Sliderskew," he softly added by way of soliloquy.

"You're a saying something you don't want me to hear," said Peg; "I know you are."

"Oh dear! the devil's in this woman," muttered Arthur; adding, with an ugly leer, "I said I trusted everything to you, Peg. That was all."

"You do that, master, and all your cares are over," said Peg approvingly.

"*When* I do that, Peg Sliderskew," thought Arthur Gride, "they will be."

Although he thought this very distinctly, he durst not move his lips lest the old woman should detect him. He even seemed half afraid that she might have read his thoughts; for he leered coaxingly upon her as he said aloud:

"Take up all loose stitches in the bottle-green with the best black silk. Have a skein of the best, and some new buttons for the coat, and—this is a good idea, Peg, and one you'll like, I know—as I have never given her anything yet, and girls like such attentions, you shall polish up a sparkling necklace that I have got up-stairs, and I'll give it her upon the wedding morning—clasp it round her charming little neck myself—and take it away again next day. He, he, he! Lock it up for her, Peg, and lose it. Who'll be made the fool of there, I wonder, to begin with—eh, Peg?"

Mrs. Sliderskew appeared to approve highly of this ingenious scheme, and expressed her satisfaction by various rackings and twitchings of her head and body, which by no means enhanced her charms. These she prolonged until she had hobbled to the door, when she exchanged them for a sour malignant look, and, twisting her under jaw from side to side, muttered hearty curses upon the future Mrs. Gride as she crept slowly down the stairs, and paused for breath at nearly every one.

"She's half a witch, I think," said Arthur Gride when he found himself again alone. "But she's very frugal, and she's very deaf. Her living costs me next to nothing; and it's no use her listening at keyholes; for she can't hear. She's a charming woman—for the purpose; a most discreet old housekeeper, and worth her weight in—copper."

Having extolled the merits of his domestic in these high terms, old Arthur went back to the burden of his song. The suit destined to grace his approaching nuptials being now selected, he replaced the others with no less care than he had displayed in drawing them from the musty nooks where they had silently reposed for many years.

Startled by a ring at the door, he hastily concluded this operation, and locked the press; but there was no need for any particular hurry, as the discreet Peg seldom knew the bell was rung unless she happened to cast her dim eyes up-

wards, and to see it shaking against the kitchen ceiling. After a short delay, however, Peg tottered in, followed by Newman Noggs.

"Ah! Mr. Noggs!" cried Arthur Gride, rubbing his hands. "My good friend, Mr. Noggs, what news do you bring for me?"

Newman, with a steadfast and immovable aspect, and his fixed eye very fixed indeed, replied, suiting the action to the word, "A letter. From Mr. Nickleby. Bearer waits."

"Won't you take a—a——"

Newman looked up and smacked his lips.

"—A chair?" said Arthur Gride.

"No," replied Newman. "Thankee."

Arthur opened the letter with trembling hands, and devoured its contents with the utmost greediness; chuckling rapturously over it, and reading it several times, before he could take it from before his eyes. So many times did he peruse and re-peruse it, that Newman considered it expedient to remind him of his presence.

"Answer," said Newman. "Bearer waits."

"True," replied old Arthur. "Yes—yes; I almost forgot, I do declare."

"I thought you were forgetting," said Newman.

"Quite right to remind me, Mr. Noggs. Oh, very right indeed!" said Arthur. "Yes. I'll write a line. I'm—I'm—rather flurried, Mr. Noggs. The news is——"

"Bad?" interrupted Newman.

"No, Mr. Noggs, thank you; good, good. The very best of news. Sit down. I'll get the pen and ink, and write a line in answer. I'll not detain you long. I know you're a treasure to your master, Mr. Noggs. He speaks of you in such terms, sometimes, that, oh dear! you'd be astonished. I may say that I do too, and always did. I always say the same of you."

"That's 'Curse Mr. Noggs with all my heart!' then, if you do," thought Newman as Gride hurried out.

The letter had fallen on the ground. Looking carefully about him for an instant, Newman, impelled by curiosity to know the result of the design he had overheard from his office closet, caught it up and rapidly read as follows:

"GRIDE,

"I saw Bray again this morning, and proposed the day after to-morrow (as you suggested) for the marriage. There is no objection on his part, and all days are alike to his daughter. We will go together, and you must be with me by seven in the morning. I need not tell you to be punctual.

"Make no further visits to the girl in the meantime. You have been there, of late, much oftener than you should. She does not languish for you, and it might have been dangerous. Restrain your youthful ardour for eight-and-forty hours, and leave her to the father. You only undo what he does, and does well.

"Yours,

"RALPH NICKLEBY."

A footstep was heard without. Newman dropped the letter on the same spot again, pressed it with his foot to prevent its fluttering away, regained his seat in a single stride, and looked as vacant and unconscious as ever mortal looked. Arthur Gride, after peering nervously about him, spied it on the ground, picked it up, and sitting down to write, glanced at Newman Noggs, who was staring at the wall with an intensity so remarkable, that Arthur was quite alarmed.

"Do you see anything particular, Mr. Noggs?" said Arthur, trying to follow the direction of Newman's eyes—which was an impossibility, and a thing no man had ever done.

"Only a cobweb," replied Newman.

"Oh! is that all?"

"No," said Newman. "There's a fly in it."

"There are a good many cobwebs here," observed Arthur Gride.

"So there are in our place," returned Newman; "and flies too."

Newman appeared to derive great entertainment from this repartee, and, to the great discomposure of Arthur Gride's nerves, produced a series of sharp cracks from his finger joints, resembling the noise of a distant discharge of small artillery. Arthur succeeded in finishing his reply to Ralph's note, nevertheless, and at length handed it over to the eccentric messenger for delivery.

"That's it, Mr. Noggs," said Gride.

Newman gave a nod, put it in his hat, and was shuffling away, when Gride, whose doting delight knew no bounds, beckoned him back again, and said, in a shrill whisper, and with a grin which puckered up his whole face, and almost obscured his eyes:

"Will you—will you take a little drop of something—just a taste?"

In good fellowship (if Arthur Gride had been capable of it) Newman would not have drunk with him one bubble of the richest wine that was ever made; but to see what he would be at, and to punish him as much as he could, he accepted the offer immediately.

Arthur Gride, therefore, again applied himself

to the press, and from a shelf laden with tall Flemish drinking-glasses and quaint bottles: some with necks like so many storks, and others with square Dutch-built bodies and short fat apoplectic throats: took down one dusty bottle of promising appearance, and two glasses of curiously small size.

"You never tasted this," said Arthur. "It's *eau d'or*—golden water. I like it on account of its name. It's a delicious name. Water of gold, golden water! Oh dear me, it seems quite a sin to drink it!"

As his courage appeared to be fast failing him, and he trifled with the stopper in a manner which threatened the dismissal of the bottle to its old place, Newman took up one of the little glasses, and clinked it twice or thrice against the bottle, as a gentle reminder that he had not been helped yet. With a deep sigh, Arthur Gride slowly filled it—though not to the brim—and then filled his own.

"Stop, stop; don't drink it yet," he said, laying his hand on Newman's; "it was given to me twenty years ago, and when I take a little taste,

"I'LL BE MARRIED IN THE BOTTLE-GREEN," CRIED ARTHUR GRIDE.

which is ve—ry seldom, I like to think of it beforehand, and tease myself. We'll drink a toast. Shall we drink a toast, Mr. Noggs?"

"Ah!" said Newman, eyeing his little glass impatiently. "Look sharp. Bearer waits."

"Why, then, I'll tell you what," tittered Arthur, "we'll drink—he, he, he!—we'll drink a lady."

"*The* ladies?" said Newman.

"No, no, Mr. Noggs," replied Gride, arresting his hand, "*a* lady. You wonder to hear me say *a* lady—I know you do, I know you do. Here's little Madeline—that's the toast. Mr. Noggs—little Madeline!"

"Madeline!" said Newman; inwardly adding, "and God help her!"

The rapidity and unconcern with which Newman dismissed his portion of the golden water had a great effect upon the old man, who sat upright in his chair, and gazed at him, open-mouthed, as if the sight had taken away his

breath. Quite unmoved, however, Newman left him to sip his own at leisure, or to pour it back again into the bottle if he chose, and departed; after greatly outraging the dignity of Peg Sliderskew by brushing past her, in the passage, without a word of apology or recognition.

Mr. Gride and his housekeeper, immediately on being left alone, resolved themselves into a committee of ways and means, and discussed the arrangements which should be made for the reception of the young bride. As they were, like some other committees, extremely dull and prolix in debate, this history may pursue the footsteps of Newman Noggs; thereby combining advantage with necessity; for it would have been necessary to do so under any circumstances, and necessity has no law, as all the world knows.

"You've been a long time," said Ralph when Newman returned.

"*He* was a long time," replied Newman.

"Bah!" cried Ralph impatiently. "Give me his note, if he gave you one: his message, if he didn't. And don't go away. I want a word with you, sir."

Newman handed in the note, and looked very virtuous and innocent while his employer broke the seal, and glanced his eye over it.

"He'll be sure to come!" muttered Ralph as he tore it to pieces. "Why, of course I know he'll be sure to come. What need to say that? Noggs! Pray, sir, what man was that with whom I saw you in the street last night?"

"I don't know," replied Newman.

"You had better refresh your memory, sir," said Ralph with a threatening look.

"I tell you," returned Newman boldly, "that I don't know. He came here twice, and asked for you. You were out. He came again. You packed him off yourself. He gave the name of Brooker."

"I know he did," said Ralph. "What then?"

"What then? Why, then he lurked about and dodged me in the street. He follows me night after night, and urges me to bring him face to face with you; as he says he has been once, and not long ago either. He wants to see you face to face, he says, and you'll soon hear him out, he warrants."

"And what say you to that?" inquired Ralph, looking keenly at his drudge.

"That it's no business of mine, and I won't. I told him he might catch you in the street, if that was all he wanted; but no! that wouldn't do. You wouldn't hear a word there, he said. He must have you alone in a room with the door locked, where he could speak without fear, and you'd soon change your tone, and hear him patiently."

"An audacious dog!" Ralph muttered.

"That's all I know," said Newman. "I say again, I don't know what man he is. I don't believe he knows himself. You have seen him; perhaps *you* do."

"I think I do," replied Ralph.

"Well," retorted Newman sulkily, "don't expect me to know him too; that's all. You'll ask me, next, why I never told you this before. What would you say if I was to tell you all that people say of you? What do you call me when I sometimes do? 'Brute, ass!' and snap at me like a dragon."

This was true enough; though the question which Newman anticipated was, in fact, upon Ralph's lips at the moment.

"He is an idle ruffian," said Ralph; "a vagabond from beyond the sea, where he travelled for his crimes; a felon let loose to run his neck into the halter; a swindler who has the audacity to try his schemes on me, who know him well. The next time he tampers with you, hand him over to the police for attempting to extort money by lies and threats—d'ye hear?—and leave the rest to me. He shall cool his heels in gaol a little time, and I'll be bound he looks for other folks to fleece when he comes out. You mind what I say, do you?"

"I hear," said Newman.

"Do it, then," returned Ralph, "and I'll reward you. Now, you may go."

Newman readily availed himself of the permission, and shutting himself up in his little office, remained there, in very serious cogitation, all day. When he was released at night, he proceeded, with all the expedition he could use, to the City, and took up his old position behind the pump, to watch for Nicholas; for Newman Noggs was proud in his way, and could not bear to appear as his friend, before the brothers Cheeryble, in the shabby and degraded state to which he was reduced.

He had not occupied this position many minutes, when he was rejoiced to see Nicholas approaching, and darted out from his ambuscade to meet him. Nicholas, on his part, was no less pleased to encounter his friend, whom he had not seen for some time; so their greeting was a warm one.

"I was thinking of you at that moment," said Nicholas.

"That's right," rejoined Newman, "and I of you. I couldn't help coming up to-night. I say, I think I am going to find out something."

"And what may that be?" returned Nicholas, smiling at this odd communication.

"I don't know what it may be, I don't know what it may not be," said Newman; "it's some secret in which your uncle is concerned, but what I've not yet been able to discover, although I have my strong suspicions. I'll not hint 'em now, in case you should be disappointed."

"*I* disappointed!" cried Nicholas. "Am I interested?"

"I think you are," replied Newman. "I have a crotchet in my head that it must be so. I have found out a man who plainly knows more than he cares to tell at once. And he has already dropped such hints to me as puzzle me—I say, as puzzle me," said Newman, scratching his red nose into a state of violent inflammation, and staring at Nicholas with all his might and main meanwhile.

Admiring what could have wound his friend up to such a pitch of mystery, Nicholas endeavoured, by a series of questions, to elucidate the cause; but in vain. Newman could not be drawn into any more explicit statement than a repetition of the perplexities he had already thrown out, and a confused oration, showing, How it was necessary to use the utmost caution; how the lynx-eyed Ralph had already seen him in company with his unknown correspondent; and how he had baffled the said Ralph by extreme guardedness of manner and ingenuity of speech: having prepared himself for such a contingency from the first.

Remembering his companion's propensity,—of which his nose, indeed, perpetually warned all beholders like a beacon,—Nicholas had drawn him into a sequestered tavern. Here they fell to reviewing the origin and progress of their acquaintance, as men sometimes do, and, tracing out the little events by which it was most strongly marked, came at last to Miss Cecilia Bobster.

"And that reminds me," said Newman, "that you never told me the young lady's real name."

"Madeline!" said Nicholas.

"Madeline!" cried Newman. "What Madeline? Her other name—say her other name."

"Bray," said Nicholas in great astonishment.

"It's the same!" cried Newman. "Sad story! Can you stand idly by, and let that unnatural marriage take place without one attempt to save her?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicholas, starting up. "Marriage! Are you mad?"

"Are you? Is she? Are you blind, deaf, senseless, dead?" said Newman. "Do you know that within one day, by means of your uncle Ralph, she will be married to a man as bad as he, and worse, if worse there is? Do you know that, within one day, she will be sacrificed, as sure as you stand there alive, to a hoary wretch—a devil born and bred, and grey in devils' ways?"

"Be careful what you say," replied Nicholas. "For Heaven's sake be careful! I am left here alone, and those who could stretch out a hand to rescue her are far away. What is it that you mean?"

"I never heard her name," said Newman, choking with his energy. "Why didn't you tell me? How was I to know? We might, at least, have had some time to think!"

"What is it that you mean?" cried Nicholas.

It was not an easy task to arrive at this information; but, after a great quantity of extraordinary pantomime, which in no way assisted it, Nicholas, who was almost as wild as Newman Noggs himself, forced the latter down upon his seat, and held him down until he began his tale.

Rage, astonishment, indignation, and a storm of passions rushed through the listener's heart as the plot was laid bare. He no sooner understood it all than, with a face of ashy paleness, and trembling in every limb, he darted from the house.

"Stop him!" cried Newman, bolting out in pursuit. "He'll be doing something desperate—he'll murder somebody—hallo! there, stop him! Stop thief! stop thief!"

CHAPTER LII.

NICHOLAS DESPAIRS OF RESCUING MADELINE BRAY, BUT PLUCKS UP HIS SPIRITS AGAIN, AND DETERMINES TO ATTEMPT IT. DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE OF THE KENWIGSES AND LILLYVICKS.

FINDING that Newman was determined to arrest his progress at any hazard, and apprehensive that some well-intentioned passenger, attracted by the cry of "Stop thief!" might lay violent hands upon his person, and place him in a disagreeable predicament from which he might have some difficulty in extricating himself, Nicholas soon slackened his pace, and suffered Newman Noggs to come up with him: which he did in so breathless a condition, that it seemed impossible he could have held out for a minute longer.

"I will go straight to Bray's," said Nicholas. "I will see this man. If there is a feeling of humanity lingering in his breast, a spark of consideration for his own child, motherless and friendless as she is, I will awaken it."

"You will not," replied Newman. "You will not, indeed."

"Then," said Nicholas, pressing onward, "I will act upon my first impulse, and go straight to Ralph Nickleby."

"By the time you reach his house he will be in bed," said Newman.

"I'll drag him from it," cried Nicholas.

"Tut, tut!" said Noggs. "Be yourself."

"You are the best of friends to me, Newman," rejoined Nicholas after a pause, and taking his hand as he spoke. "I have made head against many trials; but the misery of another, and such misery, is involved in this one, that I declare to you I am rendered desperate, and know not how to act."

In truth, it did seem a hopeless case. It was impossible to make any use of such intelligence as Newman Noggs had gleaned when he lay concealed in the closet. The mere circumstance of the compact between Ralph Nickleby and Gride would not invalidate the marriage, or render Bray averse to it, who, if he did not actually know of the existence of some such understanding, doubtless suspected it. What had been hinted, with reference to some fraud on Madeline, had been put with sufficient obscurity by Arthur Gride, but coming from Newman Noggs, and obscured still further by the smoke of his pocket pistol, it became wholly unintelligible, and involved in utter darkness.

"There seems no ray of hope," said Nicholas.

"The greater necessity for coolness, for reason, for consideration, for thought," said Newman, pausing at every alternate word to look anxiously in his friend's face. "Where are the brothers?"

"Both absent on urgent business, as they will be for a week to come."

"Is there no way of communicating with them? no way of getting one of them here by to-morrow night?"

"Impossible!" said Nicholas; "the sea is between us and them. With the fairest winds that ever blew, to go and return would take three days and nights."

"Their nephew," said Newman, "their old clerk."

"What could either do that I cannot?" rejoined Nicholas. "With reference to them, especially, I am enjoined to the strictest silence on this subject. What right have I to betray the confidence reposed in me, when nothing but a miracle can prevent this sacrifice?"

"Think," urged Newman. "Is there no way?"

"There is none," said Nicholas in utter dejection. "Not one. The father urges—the daughter consents. These demons have her in their toils; legal right, might, power, money, and every influence are on their side. How can I hope to save her?"

"Hope to the last!" said Newman, clapping him on the back. "Always hope; that's a dear boy. Never leave off hoping; it don't answer. Do you mind me, Nick? It don't answer. Don't leave a stone unturned. It's always something to know you've done the most you could. But, don't leave off hoping, or it's of no use doing anything. Hope, hope to the last!"

Nicholas needed encouragement. The suddenness with which intelligence of the two usurers' plans had come upon him, the little time which remained for exertion, the probability, almost amounting to certainty itself, that a few hours would place Madeline Bray for ever beyond his reach, consign her to unspeakable misery, and perhaps to an untimely death; all this quite stunned and overwhelmed him. Every hope connected with her that he had suffered himself to form, or had entertained unconsciously, seemed to fall at his feet, withered and dead. Every charm with which his memory or imagination had surrounded her presented itself before him, only to heighten his anguish and add new bitterness to his despair. Every feeling of sympathy for her forlorn condition, and of admiration for her heroism and fortitude, aggravated the indignation which shook him in every limb, and swelled his heart almost to bursting.

But, if Nicholas's own heart embarrassed him, Newman's came to his relief. There was so much earnestness in his remonstrance, and such sincerity and fervour in his manner, odd and ludicrous as it always was, that it imparted to Nicholas new firmness, and enabled him to say, after he had walked on for some little way in silence:

"You read me a good lesson, Newman, and I will profit by it. One step, at least, I may take —am bound to take, indeed—and to that I will apply myself to-morrow."

"What is that?" asked Noggs wistfully. "Not to threaten Ralph? Not to see the father?"

"To see the daughter, Newman," replied Nicholas. "To do what, after all, is the utmost that the brothers could do, if they were here, as Heaven send they were! To reason with her upon this hideous union, to point out to her all the horrors to which she is hastening; rashly, it may be, and without due reflection. To entreat her, at least, to pause. She can have had no counsellor for her good. Perhaps even I may

move her so far yet, though it is the eleventh hour, and she upon the very brink of ruin."

"Bravely spoken!" said Newman. "Well done, well done! Yes. Very good."

"And I do declare," cried Nicholas with honest enthusiasm, "that in this effort I am influenced by no selfish or personal considerations, but by pity for her, and detestation and abhorrence of this scheme; and that I would do the same, were there twenty rivals in the field, and I the last and least favoured of them all."

"You would, I believe," said Newman. "But where are you hurrying now?"

"Homewards," answered Nicholas. "Do you come with me, or shall I say good night?"

"I'll come a little way, if you will but walk: not run," said Noggs.

"I cannot walk to-night, Newman," returned Nicholas hurriedly. "I must move rapidly, or I could not draw my breath. I'll tell you what I've said and done to-morrow."

Without waiting for a reply, he darted off at a rapid pace, and, plunging into the crowds which thronged the street, was quickly lost to view.

"He's a violent youth at times," said Newman, looking after him; "and yet I like him for it. There's cause enough now, or the deuce is in it. Hope! I *said* hope, I think! Ralph Nickleby and Gride with their heads together—and hope for the opposite party! Ho! ho!"

It was with a very melancholy laugh that Newman Noggs concluded this soliloquy; and it was with a very melancholy shake of the head, and a very rueful countenance, that he turned about, and went plodding on his way.

This, under ordinary circumstances, would have been to some small tavern or dram-shop; that being his way, in more senses than one. But, Newman was too much interested, and too anxious, to betake himself even to this resource, and so, with many desponding and dismal reflections, went straight home.

It had come to pass, that afternoon, that Miss Morleena Kenwigs had received an invitation to repair next day, per steamer from Westminster Bridge, unto the Eel-pie Island at Twickenham: there to make merry upon a cold collation, bottled beer, shrub, and shrimps, and to dance in the open air to the music of a locomotive band, conveyed thither for the purpose: the steamer being specially engaged by a dancing-master of extensive connection for the accommodation of his numerous pupils, and the pupils displaying their appreciation of the dancing-master's services by purchasing themselves, and inducing their friends to do the like. divers light blue tickets, entitling them to join the expedition. Of these light blue tickets. one had been presented by an ambitious neighbour to Miss Morleena Kenwigs, with an invitation to join her daughters; and Mrs. Kenwigs, rightly deeming that the honour of the family was involved in Miss Morleena's making the most splendid appearance possible on so short a notice, and testifying to the dancing-master that there were other dancing-masters besides him, and to all fathers and mothers present that other people's children could learn to be genteel besides theirs, had fainted away twice under the magnitude of her preparations, but, upheld by a determination to sustain the family name or perish in the attempt, was still hard at work when Newman Noggs came home.

Now, between the italian-ironing of frills, the flouncing of trousers, the trimming of frocks, the faintings and the comings-to again, incidental to the occasion, Mrs. Kenwigs had been so entirely occupied, that she had not observed, until within half an hour before, that the flaxen tails of Miss Morleena's hair were, in a manner, run to seed; and that, unless she were put under the hands of a skilful hairdresser, she never could achieve that signal triumph over the daughters of all other people, anything less than which would be tantamount to defeat. This discovery drove Mrs. Kenwigs to despair; for the hairdresser lived three streets and eight dangerous crossings off; Morleena could not be trusted to go there alone, even if such a proceeding were strictly proper: of which Mrs. Kenwigs had her doubts; Mr. Kenwigs had not returned from business; and there was nobody to take her. So, Mrs. Kenwigs first slapped Miss Kenwigs for being the cause of her vexation, and then shed tears.

"You ungrateful child!" said Mrs. Kenwigs, "after I have gone through what I have, this night, for your good!"

"I can't help it, ma," replied Morleena, also in tears; "my hair *will* grow."

"Don't talk to me, you naughty thing!" said Mrs. Kenwigs, "don't! Even if I was to trust you by yourself, and you were to escape being run over, I know you'd run into Laura Chopkins," who was the daughter of the ambitious neighbour, "and tell her what you're going to wear to-morrow, I know you would. You've no proper pride in yourself, and are not to be trusted out of sight for an instant."

Deploring the evil-mindedness of her eldest daughter in these terms, Mrs. Kenwigs distilled fresh drops of vexation from her eyes, and declared that she did believe there never was anybody so tried as she was. Thereupon,

Morleena Kenwigs wept afresh, and they bemoaned themselves together.

Matters were at this point as Newman Noggs was heard to limp past the door on his way up-stairs; when Mrs. Kenwigs, gaining new hope from the sound of his footsteps, hastily removed from her countenance as many traces of her late emotion as were effaceable on so short a notice; and presenting herself before him, and representing their dilemma, entreated that he would escort Morleena to the hairdresser's shop.

"I wouldn't ask you, Mr. Noggs," said Mrs. Kenwigs, "if I didn't know what a good, kind-hearted creature you are—no, not for worlds. I am a weak constitution, Mr. Noggs, but my spirit would no more let me ask a favour where I thought there was a chance of its being refused, than it would let me submit to see my children trampled down and trod upon by envy and lowness!"

Newman was too good-natured not to have consented, even without this avowal of confidence on the part of Mrs. Kenwigs. Accordingly, a very few minutes had elapsed when he and Miss Morleena were on their way to the hairdresser's.

It was not exactly a hairdresser's; that is to say, people of a coarse and vulgar turn of mind might have called it a barber's; for they not only cut and curled ladies elegantly, and children carefully, but shaved gentlemen easily. Still, it was a highly genteel establishment—quite first-rate, in fact—and there were displayed in the window, besides other elegancies, waxen busts of a light lady and a dark gentleman which were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood. Indeed, some ladies had gone so far as to assert that the dark gentleman was actually a portrait of the spirited young proprietor; and the great similarity between their head-dresses—both wore very glossy hair, with a narrow walk straight down the middle, and a profusion of flat circular curls on both sides—encouraged the idea. The better informed among the sex, however, made light of this assertion; for, however willing they were (and they were very willing) to do full justice to the handsome face and figure of the proprietor, they held the countenance of the dark gentleman in the window to be an exquisite and abstract idea of masculine beauty, realised sometimes, perhaps, among angels and military men, but very rarely embodied to gladden the eyes of mortals.

It was to this establishment that Newman Noggs led Miss Kenwigs in safety. The proprietor, knowing that Miss Kenwigs had three sisters, each with two flaxen tails, and all good for sixpence apiece, once a month at least, promptly deserted an old gentleman whom he had just lathered for shaving, and handing him over to the journeyman, (who was not very popular among the ladies, by reason of his obesity and middle age,) waited on the young lady himself.

Just as this change had been effected, there presented himself for shaving a big, burly, good-humoured coalheaver with a pipe in his mouth, who, drawing his hand across his chin, requested to know when a shaver would be disengaged.

The journeyman, to whom this question was put, looked doubtfully at the young proprietor, and the young proprietor looked scornfully at the coalheaver: observing, at the same time:

"You won't get shaved here, my man."

"Why not?" said the coalheaver.

"We don't shave gentlemen in your line," remarked the young proprietor.

"Why, I see you a shaving of a baker, when I was a looking through the winder, last week," said the coalheaver.

"It's necessary to draw the line somewheres, my fine feller," replied the principal. "We draw the line there. We can't go beyond bakers. If we was to get any lower than bakers, our customers would desert us, and we might shut up shop. You must try some other establishment, sir. We couldn't do it here."

The applicant stared; grinned at Newman Noggs, who appeared highly entertained; looked slightly round the shop, as if in depreciation of the pomatum pots and other articles of stock; took his pipe out of his mouth, and gave a very loud whistle; and then put it in again, and walked out.

The old gentleman who had just been lathered, and who was sitting in a melancholy manner with his face turned towards the wall, appeared quite unconscious of this incident, and to be insensible to everything around him in the depth of a reverie—a very mournful one, to judge from the sighs he occasionally vented—in which he was absorbed. Affected by this example, the proprietor began to clip Miss Kenwigs, the journeyman to scrape the old gentleman, and Newman Noggs to read last Sunday's paper, all three in silence: when Miss Kenwigs uttered a shrill little scream, and Newman, raising his eyes, saw that it had been elicited by the circumstance of the old gentleman turning his head, and disclosing the features of Mr. Lillyvick the collector.

The features of Mr. Lillyvick they were, but

strangely altered. If ever an old gentleman had made a point of appearing in public shaved close and clean, that old gentleman was Mr. Lillyvick. If ever a collector had borne himself like a collector, and assumed, before all men, a solemn and portentous dignity, as if he had the world on his books, and it was all two quarters in arrear, that collector was Mr. Lillyvick. And now, there he sat, with the remains of a beard at least a week old encumbering his chin; a soiled and crumpled shirt-frill crouching, as it were, upon his breast, instead of standing boldly out; a demeanour so abashed and drooping, so despondent, and expressive of such humiliation, grief, and shame; that if the souls of forty unsubstantial housekeepers, all of whom had had their water cut off for non-payment of the rate, could have been concentrated in one body, that one body could hardly have expressed such mortification and defeat as were now expressed in the person of Mr. Lillyvick the collector.

Newman Noggs uttered his name, and Mr. Lillyvick groaned: then coughed to hide it. But the groan was a full-sized groan, and the cough was but a wheeze.

"Is anything the matter?" said Newman Noggs.

"Matter, sir!" cried Mr. Lillyvick. "The plug of life is dry, sir, and but the mud is left."

This speech—the style of which Newman attributed to Mr. Lillyvick's recent association with theatrical characters—not being quite explanatory, Newman looked as if he were about to ask another question, when Mr. Lillyvick prevented him by shaking his hand mournfully, and then waving his own.

"Let me be shaved!" said Mr. Lillyvick. "It shall be done before Morleena. It *is* Morleena, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Newman.

"Kenwigses have got a boy, haven't they?" inquired the collector.

Again Newman said "Yes."

"Is it a nice boy?" demanded the collector.

"It ain't a very nasty one," returned Newman, rather embarrassed by the question.

"Susan Kenwigs used to say," observed the collector, "that if ever she had another boy, she hoped it might be like me. Is this one like me, Mr. Noggs?"

This was a puzzling inquiry; but Newman evaded it by replying to Mr. Lillyvick that he thought the baby might possibly come like him in time.

"I should be glad to have somebody like me, somehow," said Mr. Lillyvick, "before I die."

"You don't mean to do that yet awhile?" said Newman.

Unto which Mr. Lillyvick replied, in a solemn voice, "Let me be shaved!" and, again consigning himself to the hands of the journeyman, said no more.

This was remarkable behaviour. So remarkable did it seem to Miss Morleena, that that young lady, at the imminent hazard of having her ear sliced off, had not been able to forbear looking round some score of times during the foregoing colloquy. Of her, however, Mr. Lillyvick took no notice: rather striving (so, at least, it seemed to Newman Noggs) to evade her observation, and to shrink into himself whenever he attracted her regards. Newman wondered very much what could have occasioned this altered behaviour on the part of the collector; but, philosophically reflecting that he would most likely know sooner or later, and that he could perfectly afford to wait, he was very little disturbed by the singularity of the old gentleman's deportment.

The cutting and curling being at last concluded, the old gentleman, who had been some time waiting, rose to go, and walking out with Newman and his charge, took Newman's arm, and proceeded for some time without making any observation. Newman, who in power of taciturnity was excelled by few people, made no attempt to break silence; and so they went on until they had very nearly reached Miss Morleena's home, when Mr. Lillyvick said:

"Were the Kenwigses very much overpowered, Mr. Noggs, by that news?"

"What news?" returned Newman.

"That about—my being——"

"Married?" suggested Newman.

"Ah!" replied Mr. Lillyvick with another groan—this time not even disguised by a wheeze.

"It made ma cry when she knew it," interposed Miss Morleena, "but we kept it from her for a long time; and pa was very low in his spirits, but he is better now; and I was very ill, but I am better too."

"Would you give your great-uncle Lillyvick a kiss if he was to ask you, Morleena?" said the collector with some hesitation.

"Yes,—Uncle Lillyvick, I would," returned Miss Morleena with the energy of both her parents combined; "but not Aunt Lillyvick. She's not an aunt of mine, and I'll never call her one."

Immediately upon the utterance of these words, Mr. Lillyvick caught Miss Morleena up in his arms, and kissed her; and, being by this

time at the door of the house where Mr. Kenwigs lodged (which, as has been before mentioned, usually stood wide open), he walked straight up into Mr. Kenwigs's sitting-room, and put Miss Morleena down in the midst. Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs were at supper. At sight of their perjured relative Mrs. Kenwigs turned faint and pale, and Mr. Kenwigs rose majestically.

"Kenwigs," said the collector, "shake hands."

"Sir," said Mr. Kenwigs, "the time has been when I was proud to shake hands with such a man as that man as now surweys me. The time has been, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs, "when a wisit from that man has excited in me and my family's boozums sensations both nateral and awakening. But now I look upon that man with emotions totally surpassing everythink, and I ask myself where is his honour, where is his straightfor'ardness, and where is his human natur'?"

"Susan Kenwigs," said Mr. Lillyvick, turning humbly to his niece, "don't you say anything to me?"

"She is not equal to it, sir," said Mr. Kenwigs, striking the table emphatically. "What with the nursing of a healthy babby, and the reflections upon your cruel conduct, four pints of malt liquor a day is hardly able to sustain her."

"I am glad," said the poor collector meekly, "that the baby is a healthy one. I am very glad of that."

This was touching the Kenwigses on their tenderest point. Mrs. Kenwigs instantly burst into tears, and Mr. Kenwigs evinced great emotion.

"My pleasantest feeling, all the time that child was expected," said Mr. Kenwigs mournfully, "was a thinking, 'If it's a boy, as I hope it may be; for I have heard its uncle Lillyvick say again and again he would prefer our having a boy next—if it's a boy, what will his uncle Lillyvick say—what will he like him to be called—will he be Peter, or Alexander, or Pompey, or Diorgeenes, or what will he be?' and now, when I look at him—a precious, unconscious, helpless infant, with no use in his little arms but to tear his little cap, and no use in his little legs but to kick his little self—when I see him a lying on his mother's lap, cooing and cooing, and, in his innocent state, almost a choking hisself with his little fist—when I see him such a infant as he is, and think that that uncle Lillyvick, as was once a-going to be so fond of him, has withdrawed himself away, such a feeling of wengeance comes over me as no language can depicter, and I feel as if even that holy babe was a telling me to hate him."

This affecting picture moved Mrs. Kenwigs deeply. After several imperfect words, which vainly attempted to struggle to the surface, but were drowned and washed away by the strong tide of her tears, she spake.

"Uncle," said Mrs. Kenwigs, "to think that you should have turned your back upon me and my dear children, and upon Kenwigs which is the author of their being—you who was once so kind and affectionate, and who, if anybody had told us such a thing of, we should have withered with scorn like lightning—you that little Lillyvick, our first and earliest boy, was named after at the very altar—oh gracious!"

"Was it money that we cared for?" said Mr. Kenwigs. "Was it property that we ever thought of?"

"No," cried Mrs. Kenwigs, "I scorn it."

"So do I," said Mr. Kenwigs, "and always did."

"My feelings have been lancerated," said Mrs. Kenwigs, "my heart has been torn asunder with anguish, I have been thrown back in my confinement, my unoffending infant has been rendered uncomfortable and fractious, Morleena has pined herself away to nothing; all this I forget and forgive, and with you, uncle, I never can quarrel. But never ask me to receive *her*—never do it, uncle. For I will not, I will not, I won't, I won't, I won't!"

"Susan, my dear," said Mr. Kenwigs, "consider your child."

"Yes," shrieked Mrs. Kenwigs, "I will consider my child! I will consider my child! my own child, that no uncles can deprive me of; my own hated, despised, deserted, cut-off little child." And here the emotions of Mrs. Kenwigs became so violent, that Mr. Kenwigs was fain to administer hartshorn internally, and vinegar externally, and to destroy a stay-lace, four petticoat strings, and several small buttons.

Newman had been a silent spectator of this scene; for Mr. Lillyvick had signed to him not to withdraw, and Mr. Kenwigs had further solicited his presence by a nod of invitation. When Mrs. Kenwigs had been in some degree restored, and Newman, as a person possessed of some influence with her, had remonstrated and begged her to compose herself, Mr. Lillyvick said, in a faltering voice:

"I never shall ask anybody here to receive my—I needn't mention the word; you know what I mean. Kenwigs and Susan, yesterday was a week she eloped with a half-pay captain!"

Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs started together.

"Eloped with a half-pay captain," repeated Mr. Lillyvick, "basely and falsely eloped with a

half-pay captain—with a bottle-nosed captain that any man might have considered himself safe from. It was in this room," said Mr. Lillyvick, looking sternly round, "that I first see Henrietta Petowker. It is in this room that I turn her off for ever."

This declaration completely changed the whole posture of affairs. Mrs. Kenwigs threw herself upon the old gentleman's neck, bitterly reproaching herself for her late harshness, and exclaiming, if she had suffered, what must his sufferings have been! Mr. Kenwigs grasped his hand, and vowed eternal friendship and remorse. Mrs. Kenwigs was horror-stricken to think that she should ever have nourished in her bosom such a snake, adder, viper, serpent, and base crocodile as Henrietta Petowker. Mr. Kenwigs argued that she must have been bad indeed not to have improved by so long a contemplation of Mrs. Kenwigs's virtue. Mrs. Kenwigs remembered that Mr. Kenwigs had often said that he was not quite satisfied of the propriety of Miss Petowker's conduct, and wondered how it was that she could have been blinded by such a wretch. Mr. Kenwigs remembered that he had had his suspicions, but did not wonder why Mrs. Kenwigs had not had hers, as she was all chastity, purity, and truth, and Henrietta all baseness, falsehood, and deceit. And Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs both said, with strong feelings and tears of sympathy, that everything happened for the best: and conjured the good collector not to give way to unavailing grief, but to seek consolation in the society of those affectionate relations whose arms and hearts were ever open to him.

"Out of affection and regard for you, Susan and Kenwigs," said Mr. Lillyvick, "and not out of revenge and spite against her, for she is below it, I shall, to-morrow morning, settle upon your children, and make payable to the survivors of them when they come of age or marry, that money that I once meant to leave 'em in my will. The deed shall be executed to-morrow, and Mr. Noggs shall be one of the witnesses. He hears me promise this, and he shall see it done."

Overpowered by this noble and generous offer, Mr. Kenwigs, Mrs. Kenwigs, and Miss Morleena Kenwigs all began to sob together; and the noise of their sobbing communicating itself to the next room, where the children lay abed, and causing them to cry too, Mr. Kenwigs rushed wildly in, and bringing them out in his arms, by two and two, tumbled them down in their night-caps and gowns at the feet of Mr. Lillyvick, and called upon them to thank and bless him.

"And now," said Mr. Lillyvick when a heart-rending scene had ensued and the children were cleared away again, "give me some supper. This took place twenty mile from town. I came up this morning, and have been lingering about all day, without being able to make up my mind to come and see you. I humoured her in everything, she had her own way, she did just as she pleased, and now she has done this. There was twelve tea-spoons and twenty-four pound in sovereigns—I missed them first—it's a trial—I feel I shall never be able to knock a double knock again when I go my rounds—don't say anything more about it, please—the spoons were worth—never mind—never mind!"

With such muttered outpourings as these, the old gentleman shed a few tears; but, they got him into the elbow-chair, and prevailed upon him, without much pressing, to make a hearty supper, and by the time he had finished his first pipe, and disposed of half-a-dozen glasses out of a crown bowl of punch, ordered by Mr. Kenwigs, in celebration of his return to the bosom of his family, he seemed, though still very humble, quite resigned to his fate, and rather relieved than otherwise by the flight of his wife.

"When I see that man," said Mr. Kenwigs, with one hand round Mrs. Kenwigs's waist: his other hand supporting his pipe (which made him wink and cough very much, for he was no smoker): and his eyes on Morleena, who sat upon her uncle's knee, "when I see that man as mingling once again in the spear which he adorns, and see his affections deweloping themselves in legitimate sitiwations, I feel that his nature is as elewated and expanded as his standing afore society as a public character is unimpeached, and the woices of my infant children, purvided for in life, seem to whisper to me softly, 'This is an ewent at which Evins itself looks down!'"

CHAPTER LIII.

CONTAINING THE FURTHER PROGRESS OF THE PLOT CONTRIVED BY MR. RALPH NICKLEBY AND MR. ARTHUR GRIDE.

WITH that settled resolution and steadiness of purpose to which extreme circumstances so often give birth, acting upon far less excitable and more sluggish temperaments than that which was the lot of Madeline Bray's admirer, Nicholas started, at dawn of day, from the restless couch which no sleep had visited on the previous night, and prepared to make that last appeal, by whose

slight and fragile thread her only remaining hope of escape depended.

Although, to restless and ardent minds, morning may be the fitting season for exertion and activity, it is not always at that time that hope is strongest, or the spirit most sanguine and buoyant. In trying and doubtful positions, youth, custom, a steady contemplation of the difficulties which surround us, and a familiarity with them, imperceptibly diminish our apprehensions, and beget comparative indifference, if not a vague and reckless confidence in some relief, the means or nature of which we care not to foresee. But when we come fresh upon such things in the morning, with that dark and silent gap between us and yesterday; with every link in the brittle chain of hope to rivet afresh; our hot enthusiasm subdued, and cool calm reason substituted in its stead; doubt and misgiving revive. As the traveller sees farthest by day, and becomes aware of rugged mountains and trackless plains which the friendly darkness had shrouded from his sight and mind together, so, the wayfarer in the toilsome path of human life sees, with each returning sun, some new obstacle to surmount, some new height to be attained. Distances stretch out before him which, last night, were scarcely taken into account, and the light which gilds all nature with its cheerful beams seems but to shine upon the weary obstacles that yet lie strewn between him and the grave.

So thought Nicholas, when, with the impatience natural to a situation like his, he softly left the house, and feeling as though to remain in bed were to lose most precious time, and to be up and stirring were in some way to promote the end he had in view, wandered into London; perfectly well knowing that for hours to come he could not obtain speech with Madeline, and could do nothing but wish the intervening time away.

And, even now, as he paced the streets, and listlessly looked round on the gradually-increasing bustle and preparation for the day, everything appeared to yield him some new occasion for despondency. Last night, the sacrifice of a young, affectionate, and beautiful creature to such a wretch, and in such a cause, had seemed a thing too monstrous to succeed; and the warmer he grew, the more confident he felt that some interposition must save her from his clutches. But now, when he thought how regularly things went on, from day to day, in the same unvarying round—how youth and beauty died, and ugly griping age lived tottering on—how crafty avarice grew rich, and manly honest hearts were poor and sad—how few they were who tenanted the stately houses, and how many those who lay in noisome pens, or rose each day and laid them down each night, and lived and died, father and son, mother and child, race upon race, and generation upon generation, without a home to shelter them, or the energies of one single man directed to their aid—how, in seeking, not a luxurious and splendid life, but the bare means of a most wretched and inadequate subsistence, there were women and children in that one town, divided into classes, numbered and estimated as regularly as the noble families and folks of great degree, and reared from infancy to drive most criminal and dreadful trades—how ignorance was punished and never taught—how gaol doors gaped, and gallows loomed, for thousands urged towards them by circumstances darkly curtaining their very cradles' heads, and but for which they might have earned their honest bread and lived in peace—how many died in soul, and had no chance of life—how many who could scarcely go astray, be they vicious as they would, turned haughtily from the crushed and stricken wretch who could scarce do otherwise, and who would have been a greater wonder, had he or she done well, than even they had they done ill—how much injustice, misery, and wrong there was, and yet how the world rolled on, from year to year, alike careless and indifferent, and no man seeking to remedy or redress it—when he thought of all this, and selected from the mass the one slight case on which his thoughts were bent, he felt, indeed, that there was little ground for hope, and little reason why it should not form an atom in the huge aggregate of distress and sorrow, and add one small and unimportant unit to swell the great amount.

But youth is not prone to contemplate the darkest side of a picture it can shift at will. By dint of reflecting on what he had to do, and reviving the train of thought which night had interrupted, Nicholas gradually summoned up his utmost energy, and, when the morning was sufficiently advanced for his purpose, had no thought but that of using it to the best advantage. A hasty breakfast taken, and such affairs of business as required prompt attention disposed of, he directed his steps to the residence of Madeline Bray: whither he lost no time in arriving.

It had occurred to him that, very possibly, the young lady might be denied, although to him she never had been; and he was still pondering upon the surest method of obtaining access to her in that case, when, coming to the door of the house, he found it had been left ajar—probably

by the last person who had gone out. The occasion was not one upon which to observe the nicest ceremony; therefore, availing himself of this advantage, Nicholas walked gently up-stairs, and knocked at the door of the room into which he had been accustomed to be shown. Receiving permission to enter from some person on the other side, he opened the door and walked in.

Bray and his daughter were sitting there alone. It was nearly three weeks since he had seen her last, but there was a change in the lovely girl before him which told Nicholas, in startling terms, how much mental suffering had been compressed into that short time. There are no words which can express, nothing with which can be compared, the perfect pallor, the clear transparent whiteness, of the beautiful face which turned towards him when he entered. Her hair was a rich deep brown, but shading that face, and straying upon a neck that rivalled it in whiteness, it seemed by the strong contrast raven black. Something of wildness and restlessness there was in the dark eye, but there was the same patient look, the same expression of gentle mournfulness which he well remembered, and no trace of a single tear. Most beautiful—more beautiful, perhaps, than ever—there was something in her face which quite unmanned him, and appeared far more touching than the wildest agony of grief. It was not merely calm and composed, but fixed and rigid, as though the violent effort which had summoned that composure beneath her father's eye, while it mastered all other thoughts, had prevented even the momentary expression they had communicated to the features from subsiding, and had fastened it there as an evidence of its triumph.

The father sat opposite to her—not looking directly in her face, but glancing at her as he talked with a gay air which ill disguised the anxiety of his thoughts. The drawing materials were not on their accustomed table, nor were any of the other tokens of her usual occupations to be seen. The little vases which Nicholas had always seen filled with fresh flowers were empty, or supplied only with a few withered stalks and leaves. The bird was silent. The cloth that covered his cage at night was not removed. His mistress had forgotten him.

There are times when, the mind being painfully alive to receive impressions, a great deal may be noted at a glance. This was one, for Nicholas had but glanced round him when he was recognised by Mr. Bray, who said impatiently:

"Now, sir, what do you want? Name your errand here quickly, if you please, for my daughter and I are busily engaged with other and more important matters than those you come about. Come, sir, address yourself to your business at once."

Nicholas could very well discern that the irritability and impatience of this speech were assumed, and that Bray, in his heart, was rejoiced at any interruption which promised to engage the attention of his daughter. He bent his eyes involuntarily upon the father as he spoke, and marked his uneasiness; for he coloured and turned his head away.

The device, however, so far as it was a device for causing Madeline to interfere, was successful. She rose, and, advancing towards Nicholas, paused half-way, and stretched out her hand as expecting a letter.

"Madeline," said her father impatiently, "my love, what are you doing?"

"Miss Bray expects an enclosure, perhaps," said Nicholas, speaking very distinctly, and with an emphasis she could scarcely misunderstand. "My employer is absent from England, or I should have brought a letter with me. I hope she will give me time—a little time—I ask a very little time."

"If that is all you come about, sir," said Mr. Bray, "you may make yourself easy on that head. Madeline, my dear, I didn't know this person was in your debt?"

"A—a trifle, I believe," returned Madeline faintly.

"I suppose you think, now," said Bray, wheeling his chair round and confronting Nicholas, "that, but for such pitiful sums as you bring here, because my daughter has chosen to employ her time as she has, we should starve?"

"I have not thought about it," returned Nicholas.

"You have not thought about it!" sneered the invalid. "You know you *have* thought about it, and have thought that, and think so every time you come here. Do you suppose, young man, that I don't know what little purse-proud tradesmen are, when, through some fortunate circumstances, they get the upper hand for a brief day—or think they get the upper hand—of a gentleman?"

"My business," said Nicholas respectfully, "is with a lady."

"With a gentleman's daughter, sir," returned the sick man, "and the pettifogging spirit is the same. But perhaps you bring *orders*, eh? Have you any fresh *orders* for my daughter, sir?"

Nicholas understood the tone of triumph in

which this interrogatory was put; but, remembering the necessity of supporting his assumed character, produced a scrap of paper purporting to contain a list of some subjects for drawings which his employer desired to have executed; and with which he had prepared himself in case of any such contingency.

"Oh!" said Mr. Bray. "These are the orders, are they?"

"Since you insist upon the term, sir—yes," replied Nicholas.

"Then you may tell your master," said Bray, tossing the paper back again, with an exulting smile, "that my daughter—Miss Madeline Bray—condescends to employ herself no longer in such labours as these; that she is not at his beck and call, as he supposes her to be; that we don't live upon his money, as he flatters himself we do; that he may give whatever he owes us to the first beggar that passes his shop, or add it to his own profits next time he calculates them; and that he may go to the devil for me. That's my acknowledgment of his orders, sir!"

"And this is the independence of a man who sells his daughter as he has sold that weeping girl!" thought Nicholas.

The father was too much absorbed with his own exultation to mark the look of scorn which, for an instant, Nicholas could not have suppressed had he been upon the rack. "There," he continued after a short silence, "you have your message, and can retire—unless you have any further—ha!—any further orders."

"I have none," said Nicholas; "nor, in consideration of the station you once held, have I used that or any other word which, however harmless in itself, could be supposed to imply authority on my part, or dependence on yours. I have no orders, but I have fears—fears that I will express, chafe as you may—fears that you may be consigning that young lady to something worse than supporting you by the labour of her hands, had she worked herself dead. These are my fears, and these fears I found upon your own demeanour. Your conscience will tell you, sir, whether I construe it well or not."

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Madeline, interposing in alarm between them. "Remember, sir, he is ill."

"Ill!" cried the invalid, gasping and catching for breath. "Ill! Ill! I am bearded and bullied by a shopboy, and she beseeches him to pity me, and remember I am ill!"

He fell into a paroxysm of his disorder, so violent that for a few moments Nicholas was alarmed for his life; but, finding that he began to recover, he withdrew, after signifying by a gesture to the young lady that he had something important to communicate, and would wait for her outside the room. He could hear that the sick man came gradually, but slowly, to himself, and that without any reference to what had just occurred, as though he had no distinct recollection of it as yet, he requested to be left alone.

"Oh!" thought Nicholas, "that this slender chance might not be lost, and that I might prevail, if it were but for one week's time and reconsideration!"

"You are charged with some commission to me, sir," said Madeline, presenting herself in great agitation. "Do not press it now, I beg and pray you. The day after to-morrow—come here then."

"It will be too late—too late for what I have to say," rejoined Nicholas, "and you will not be here. Oh, madam, if you have but one thought of him who sent me here, but one last lingering care for your own peace of mind and heart, I do for God's sake urge you to give me a hearing."

She attempted to pass him, but Nicholas gently detained her.

"A hearing," said Nicholas. "I ask you but to hear me—not me alone, but him for whom I speak, who is far away, and does not know your danger. In the name of Heaven hear me!"

The poor attendant, with her eyes swollen and red with weeping, stood by; and to her Nicholas appealed in such passionate terms that she opened a side-door, and, supporting her mistress into an adjoining room, beckoned Nicholas to follow them.

"Leave me, sir, pray," said the young lady.

"I cannot, will not leave you thus," returned Nicholas. "I have a duty to discharge; and either here, or in the room from which we have just now come, at whatever risk or hazard to Mr. Bray, I must beseech you to contemplate again the fearful course to which you have been impelled."

"What course is this you speak of, and impelled by whom, sir?" demanded the young lady, with an effort to speak proudly.

"I speak of this marriage," returned Nicholas, "of this marriage, fixed for to-morrow by one who never faltered in a bad purpose, or lent his aid to any good design; of this marriage, the history of which is known to me better, far better, than it is to you. I know what web is wound about you. I know what men they are from whom these schemes have come. You are betrayed and sold for money—for gold, whose every coin is rusted with tears, if not red with the blood of ruined men, who have fallen desperately by their own mad hands."

"You say you have a duty to discharge," said Madeline, "and so have I. And, with the help of Heaven, I will perform it."

"Say rather, with the help of devils," replied Nicholas, "with the help of men, one of them your destined husband, who are——"

"I must not hear this," cried the young lady, striving to repress a shudder, occasioned, as it seemed, even by this slight allusion to Arthur Gride. "This evil, if evil it be, has been of my own seeking. I am impelled to this course by no one, but follow it of my own free-will. You

"I MUST BESEECH YOU TO CONTEMPLATE AGAIN THE FEARFUL COURSE TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN IMPELLED."

see I am not constrained or forced. Report this," said Madeline, "to my dear friend and benefactor, and, taking with you my prayers and thanks for him and for yourself, leave me for ever!"

"Not until I have besought you, with all the earnestness and fervour by which I am animated," cried Nicholas, "to postpone this marriage for one short week. Not until I have besought you to think more deeply than you can have done, influenced as you are, upon the step you are about to take. Although you can-

not be fully conscious of the villainy of this man to whom you are about to give your hand, some of his deeds you know. You have heard him speak, and have looked upon his face. Reflect, reflect, before it is too late, on the mockery of plighting to him, at the altar, faith in which your heart can have no share—of uttering solemn words, against which nature and reason must rebel—of the degradation of yourself in your own esteem which must ensue, and must be aggravated every day, as his detested character opens upon you more and more. Shrink from the loathsome companionship of this wretch as you would from corruption and disease. Suffer toil and labour if you will, but shun him, shun him, and be happy. For, believe me, I speak the truth;—the most abject poverty, the most wretched condition of human life, with a pure and upright mind, would be happiness to that which you must undergo as the wife of such a man as this!"

Long before Nicholas ceased to speak, the young lady buried her face in her hands, and gave her tears free way. In a voice at first inarticulate with emotion, but gradually recovering strength as she proceeded, she answered him:

"I will not disguise from you, sir—though perhaps I ought—that I have undergone great pain of mind, and have been nearly broken-hearted since I saw you last. I do *not* love this gentleman. The difference between our ages, tastes, and habits forbids it. This he knows, and, knowing, still offers me his hand. By accepting it, and by that step alone, I can release my father, who is dying in this place; prolong his life, perhaps, for many years; restore him to comfort—I may almost call it affluence—and relieve a generous man from the burden of assisting one by whom, I grieve to say, his noble heart is little understood. Do not think so poorly of me as to believe that I feign a love I do not feel. Do not report so ill of me, for *that* I could not bear. If I cannot, in reason or in nature, love the man who pays this price for my poor hand, I can discharge the duties of a wife: I can be all he seeks in me, and will. He is content to take me as I am. I have passed my word, and should rejoice, not weep, that it is so. I do. The interest you take in one so friendless and forlorn as I, the delicacy with which you have discharged your trust, the faith you have kept with me, have my warmest thanks: and, while I make this last feeble acknowledgment, move me to tears, as you see. But I do not repent, nor am I unhappy. I am happy in the prospect of all I can achieve so easily. I shall be more so when I look back upon it, and all is done, I know."

"Your tears fall faster as you talk of happiness," said Nicholas, "and you shun the contemplation of that dark future which must be laden with so much misery to you. Defer this marriage for a week—for but one week!"

"He was talking, when you came upon us just now, with such smiles as I remember to have seen of old, and have not seen for many and many a day, of the freedom that was to come to-morrow," said Madeline with momentary firmness, "of the welcome change, the fresh air: all the new scenes and objects that would bring fresh life to his exhausted frame. His eye grew bright, and his face lightened at the thought. I will not defer it for an hour."

"These are but tricks and wiles to urge you on," cried Nicholas.

"I'll hear no more," said Madeline hurriedly; "I have heard too much—more than I should—already. What I have said to you, sir, I have said as to that dear friend to whom I trust in you honourably to repeat it. Some time hence, when I am more composed and reconciled to my new mode of life, if I should live so long, I will write to him. Meantime, all holy angels shower blessings on his head, and prosper and preserve him!"

She was hurrying past Nicholas, when he threw himself before her, and implored her to think, but once again, upon the fate to which she was precipitately hastening.

"There is no retreat," said Nicholas in an agony of supplication; "no withdrawing! All regret will be unavailing, and deep and bitter it must be. What can I say that will induce you to pause at this last moment? What can I do to save you?"

"Nothing," she incoherently replied. "This is the hardest trial I have had. Have mercy on me, sir, I beseech, and do not pierce my heart with such appeals as these! I—I hear him calling. I—I—must not, will not, remain here for another instant."

"If this were a plot," said Nicholas with the same violent rapidity with which she spoke, "a plot, not yet laid bare by me, but which, with time, I might unravel; if you were (not knowing it) entitled to fortune of your own, which, being recovered, would do all that this marriage can accomplish, would you not retract?"

"No, no, no! It is impossible! it is a child's tale. Time would bring his death. He is calling again!"

"It may be the last time we shall ever meet

on earth," said Nicholas; "it may be better for me that we should never meet more."

"For both—for both," replied Madeline, not heeding what she said. "The time will come when to recall the memory of this one interview might drive me mad. Be sure to tell them that you left me calm and happy. And God be with you, sir, and my grateful heart and blessing!"

She was gone. Nicholas, staggering from the house, thought of the hurried scene which had just closed upon him as if it were the phantom of some wild, unquiet dream. The day wore on; at night, having been enabled in some measure to collect his thoughts, he issued forth again.

That night, being the last of Arthur Gride's bachelorship, found him in tiptop spirits and great glee. The bottle-green suit had been brushed, ready for the morrow. Peg Sliderskew had rendered the accounts of her past housekeeping; the eighteen-pence had been rigidly accounted for (she was never trusted with a larger sum at once, and the accounts were not usually balanced more than twice a day); every preparation had been made for the coming festival; and Arthur might have sat down and contemplated his approaching happiness, but that he preferred sitting down and contemplating the entries in a dirty old vellum book with rusty clasps.

"Well-a-day!" he chuckled, as, sinking on his knees before a strong chest screwed down to the floor, he thrust in his arm nearly up to the shoulder, and slowly drew forth this greasy volume. "Well-a-day, now, this is all my library, but it's one of the most entertaining books that were ever written! It's a delightful book, and all true and real—that's the best of it—true as the Bank of England, and real as its gold and silver. Written by Arthur Gride—he, he, he! None of your story-book writers will ever make as good a book as this, I warrant me. It's composed for private circulation—for my own particular reading, and nobody else's. He, he, he!"

Muttering this soliloquy Arthur carried his precious volume to the table, and, adjusting it upon a dusty desk, put on his spectacles, and began to pore among the leaves.

"It's a large sum to Mr. Nickleby," he said in a dolorous voice. "Debt to be paid in full, nine hundred and seventy-five, four, three. Additional sum, as per bond, five hundred pound. One thousand, four hundred and seventy-five pounds, four shillings, and threepence, tomorrow at twelve o'clock. On the other side, though, there's the *per contra*, by means of this pretty chick. But, again, there's the question whether I mightn't have brought all this about myself. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' Why was my heart so faint? Why didn't I boldly open it to Bray myself, and save one thousand four hundred and seventy-five, four, three?"

These reflections depressed the old usurer so much as to wring a feeble groan or two from his breast, and cause him to declare, with uplifted hands, that he would die in a workhouse. Remembering, on further cogitation, however, that under any circumstances he must have paid, or handsomely compounded for, Ralph's debt, and being by no means confident that he would have succeeded had he undertaken his enterprise alone, he regained his equanimity, and chattered and mowed over more satisfactory items, until the entrance of Peg Sliderskew interrupted him.

"Aha, Peg!" said Arthur, "what is it? What is it now, Peg?"

"It's the fowl," replied Peg, holding up a plate containing a little—a very little one—quite a phenomenon of a fowl—so very small and skinny.

"A beautiful bird!" said Arthur after inquiring the price, and finding it proportionate to the size. "With a rasher of ham, and an egg made into sauce, and potatoes, and greens, and an apple-pudding, Peg, and a little bit of cheese, we shall have a dinner for an emperor. There'll only be she and me—and you, Peg, when we've done."

"Don't you complain of the expense afterwards," said Mrs. Sliderskew sulkily.

"I am afraid we must live expensively for the first week," returned Arthur with a groan, "and then we must make up for it. I won't eat more than I can help, and I know you love your old master too much to eat more than *you* can help, don't you, Peg?"

"Don't I what?" said Peg.

"Love your old master too much——"

"No, not a bit too much," said Peg.

"Oh dear, I wish the devil had this woman!" cried Arthur. —"Love him too much to eat more than you can help at his expense."

"At his what?" said Peg.

"Oh dear! she can never hear the most important word, and hears all the others!" whined Gride. "At his expense—you catamaran!"

The last-mentioned tribute to the charms of Mrs. Sliderskew being uttered in a whisper, that lady assented to the general proposition by a harsh growl, which was accompanied by a ring at the street-door.

"There's the bell," said Arthur.

"Ay, ay; I know that," rejoined Peg.

"Then why don't you go?" bawled Arthur.

"Go where?" retorted Peg. "I ain't doing any harm here, am I?"

Arthur Gride in reply repeated the word "bell" as loud as he could roar; and, his meaning being rendered further intelligible to Mrs. Sliderskew's dull sense of hearing by pantomime expressive of ringing at a street-door, Peg hobbled out, after sharply demanding why he hadn't said there was a ring before, instead of talking about all manner of things that had nothing to do with it, and keeping her half-pint of beer waiting on the steps.

"There's a change come over you, Mrs. Peg," said Arthur, following her out with his eyes. "What it means I don't quite know; but, if it lasts, we shan't agree together long, I see. You are turning crazy, I think. If you are, you must take yourself off, Mrs. Peg—or be taken off. All's one to me. Turning over the leaves of his book as he muttered this, he soon lighted upon something which attracted his attention, and forgot Peg Sliderskew and everything else in the engrossing interest of its pages.

The room had no other light than that which it derived from a dim and dirt-clogged lamp, whose lazy wick, being still further obscured by a dark shade, cast its feeble rays over a very little space, and left all beyond in heavy shadow. This lamp the money-lender had drawn so close to him, that there was only room between it and himself for the book over which he bent; and, as he sat with his elbows on the desk, and his sharp cheek bones resting on his hands, it only served to bring out his ugly features in strong relief, together with the little table at which he sat, and to shroud all the rest of the chamber in a deep sullen gloom. Raising his eyes, and looking vacantly into this gloom as he made some mental calculation, Arthur Gride suddenly met the fixed gaze of a man.

"Thieves! thieves!" shrieked the usurer, starting up and folding his book to his breast, "robbers! murder!"

"What is the matter?" said the form, advancing.

"Keep off!" cried the trembling wretch. "Is it a man or a—a——"

"For what do you take me, if not for a man?" was the inquiry.

"Yes, yes," cried Arthur Gride, shading his eyes with his hand, "it is a man, and not a spirit. It is a man. Robbers! Robbers!"

"For what are these cries raised—unless, indeed, you know me, and have some purpose in your brain?" said the stranger, coming close up to him. "I am no thief."

"What then, and how come you here?" cried Gride, somewhat reassured, but still retreating from his visitor. "What is your name, and what do you want?"

"My name you need not know," was the reply. "I came here because I was shown the way by your servant. I have addressed you twice or thrice, but you were too profoundly engaged with your book to hear me, and I have been silently waiting until you should be less abstracted. What I want I will tell you when you can summon up courage enough to hear and understand me."

Arthur Gride, venturing to regard his visitor more attentively, and perceiving that he was a young man of good mien and bearing, returned to his seat, and muttering that there were bad characters about, and that this, with former attempts upon his house, had made him nervous, requested his visitor to sit down. This, however, he declined.

"Good God! I don't stand up to have you at an advantage," said Nicholas (for Nicholas it was), as he observed a gesture of alarm on the part of Gride. "Listen to me. You are to be married to-morrow morning."

"N—n—no," rejoined Gride. "Who said I was? How do you know that?"

"No matter how," replied Nicholas, "I know it. The young lady who is to give you her hand hates and despises you. Her blood runs cold at the mention of your name—the vulture and the lamb, the rat and the dove, could not be worse matched than you and she. You see I know her."

Gride looked at him as if he were petrified with astonishment, but did not speak; perhaps lacking the power.

"You and another man, Ralph Nickleby by name, have hatched this plot between you," pursued Nicholas. "You pay him for his share in bringing about this sale of Madeline Bray. You do. A lie is trembling on your lips, I see."

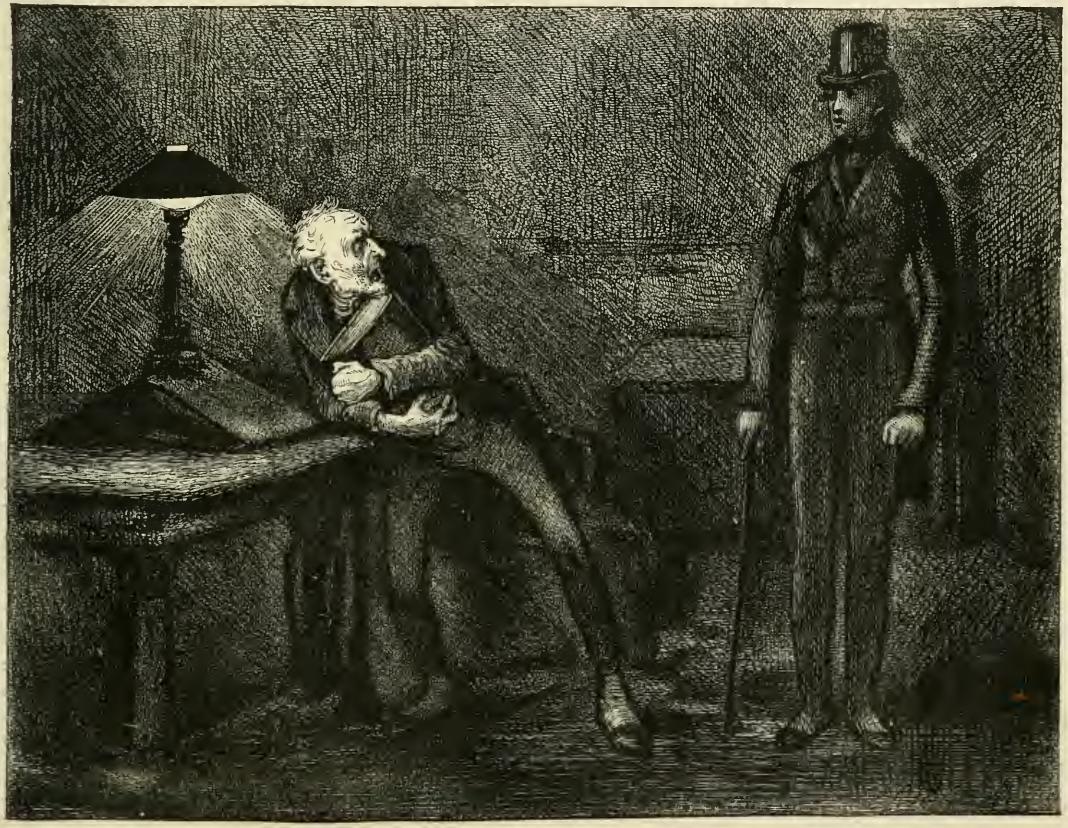
He paused; but, Arthur making no reply, resumed again.

"You pay yourself by defrauding her. How or by what means—for I scorn to sully her cause by falsehood or deceit—I do not know; at present I do not know, but I am not alone or single-handed in this business. If the energy of man can compass the discovery of your fraud and treachery before your death—if wealth, revenge, and just hatred can hunt and track you through your windings—you will yet be called to a dear account for this. We are on the scent already—judge you, who know what we do not, when we shall have you down!"

He paused again, and still Arthur Gride glared upon him in silence.

"If you were a man to whom I could appeal with any hope of touching his compassion or humanity," said Nicholas, "I would urge upon you to remember the helplessness, the innocence, the youth, of this lady; her worth and beauty, her filial excellence, and last, and more than all, as concerning you more nearly, the appeal she has made to your mercy and your manly feeling. But, I take the only ground that can be taken with men like you, and ask what money will buy you off. Remember the danger to which you are exposed. You see I know enough to know much more with very little help. Bate some expected gain for the risk you save, and say what is your price."

Old Arthur Gride moved his lips, but they only formed an ugly smile, and were motionless again.



"THIEVES! THIEVES!" SHRIEKED THE USURER, STARTING UP AND FOLDING HIS BOOK TO HIS BREAST, "ROBBERS! MURDER!"

"You think," said Nicholas, "that the price would not be paid. Miss Bray has wealthy friends who would coin their very hearts to save her in such a strait as this. Name your price, defer these nuptials for but a few days, and see whether those I speak of shrink from the payment. Do you hear me?"

When Nicholas began, Arthur Gride's impression was that Ralph Nickleby had betrayed him; but, as he proceeded, he felt convinced that, however he had come by the knowledge he possessed, the part he acted was a genuine one, and that with Ralph he had no concern. All he seemed to know, for certain, was, that he, Gride, paid Ralph's debt; but that, to anybody who knew the circumstances of Bray's detention —even to Bray himself, on Ralph's own statement—must be perfectly notorious. As to the fraud on Madeline herself, his visitor knew so little about its nature or extent, that it might

be a lucky guess, or a hap-hazard accusation. Whether or no, he had clearly no key to the mystery, and could not hurt him who kept it close within his own breast. The allusion to friends, and the offer of money, Gride held to be mere empty vapouring, for purposes of delay. "And even if money were to be had," thought Arthur Gride as he glanced at Nicholas, and trembled with passion at his boldness and audacity, "I'd have that dainty chick for my wife, and cheat *you* of her, young smooth-face!"

Long habit of weighing and noting well what clients said, and nicely balancing chances in his mind and calculating odds to their faces, without the least appearance of being so engaged, had rendered Gride quick in forming conclusions, and arriving, from puzzling, intricate, and often contradictory premises, at very cunning deductions. Hence it was that, as Nicholas went on, he followed him closely with his own constructions, and, when he ceased to speak, was as well prepared as if he had deliberated for a fortnight.

"I hear you," he cried, starting from his seat, casting back the fastenings of the window shutters, and throwing up the sash. "Help here! Help! Help!"

"What are you doing?" said Nicholas, seizing him by the arm.

"I'll cry robbers, thieves, murder, alarm the neighbourhood, struggle with you, let loose some blood, and swear you came to rob me, if you don't quit my house," replied Gride, drawing in his head with a frightful grin, "I will!"

"Wretch!" cried Nicholas.

"*You'll* bring your threats here, will you?" said Gride, whom jealousy of Nicholas and a sense of his own triumph had converted into a perfect fiend. "You, the disappointed lover—oh dear! He! he! he! But you shan't have her, nor she you. She's my wife, my doting little wife. Do you think she'll miss you? Do you think she'll weep? I shall like to see her weep—I shan't mind it. She looks prettier in tears."

"Villain!" said Nicholas, choking with his rage.

"One minute more," cried Arthur Gride, "and I'll rouse the street with such screams as, if they were raised by anybody else, should wake me even in the arms of pretty Madeline."

"You hound!" said Nicholas. "If you were but a younger man——"

"Oh yes!" sneered Arthur Gride, "if I was but a younger man it wouldn't be so bad; but for me, so old and ugly—to be jilted by little Madeline for me!"

"Hear me," said Nicholas, "and be thankful I have enough command over myself not to fling you into the street, which no aid could prevent my doing if I once grappled with you. I have been no lover of this lady's. No contract or engagement, no word of love, has ever passed between us. She does not even know my name."

"I'll ask it for all that—I'll beg it of her with kisses," said Arthur Gride. "Yes, and she'll tell me, and pay them back, and we'll laugh together, and hug ourselves—and be very merry—when we think of the poor youth that wanted to have her, but couldn't because she was bespoke by me!"

This taunt brought such an expression into the face of Nicholas, that Arthur Gride plainly apprehended it to be the forerunner of his putting his threat of throwing him into the street in immediate execution; for he thrust his head out of the window, and, holding tight on with both hands, raised a pretty brisk alarm. Not thinking it necessary to abide the issue of the noise, Nicholas gave vent to an indignant defiance, and stalked from the room and from the house. Arthur Gride watched him across the street, and then, drawing in his head, fastened the window as before, and sat down to take breath.

"If she ever turns pettish or ill-humoured, I'll taunt her with that spark," he said when he had recovered. "She'll little think I know about him; and, if I manage it well, I can break her spirit by this means, and have her under my thumb. I'm glad nobody came. I didn't call too loud. The audacity to enter my house, and open upon me! But I shall have a very good triumph to-morrow, and he'll be gnawing his fingers off: perhaps drown himself or cut his throat! I shouldn't wonder! That would make it quite complete, that would—quite."

When he had become restored to his usual condition by these and other comments on his approaching triumph, Arthur Gride put away his book, and, having locked the chest with great caution, descended into the kitchen to warn Peg Sliderskew to bed, and scold her for having afforded such ready admission to a stranger.

The unconscious Peg, however, not being able to comprehend the offence of which she had been guilty, he summoned her to hold the light, while he made a tour of the fastenings, and secured the street-door with his own hands.

"Top bolt," muttered Arthur, fastening as he spoke, "bottom bolt—chain—bar—double lock

—and key out to put under my pillow! So, if any more rejected admirers come, they may come through the keyhole. And now I'll go to sleep till half-past five, when I must get up to be married, Peg!"

With that, he jocularly tapped Mrs. Sliderskew under the chin, and appeared, for the moment, inclined to celebrate the close of his bachelor days by imprinting a kiss on her shrivelled lips. Thinking better of it, however, he gave her chin another tap, in lieu of that warmer familiarity, and stole away to bed.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE CRISIS OF THE PROJECT, AND ITS RESULT.

THERE are not many men who lie abed too late, or oversleep themselves, on their wedding morning. A legend there is of somebody remarkable for absence of mind, who opened his eyes upon the day which was to give him a young wife, and, forgetting all about the matter, rated his servants for providing him with such fine clothes as had been prepared for the festival. There is also a legend of a young gentleman who, not having before his eyes the fear of the canons of the church for such cases made and provided, conceived a passion for his grandmother. Both cases are of a singular and special kind, and it is very doubtful whether either can be considered as a precedent likely to be extensively followed by succeeding generations.

Arthur Gride had enrobed himself in his marriage garments of bottle-green a full hour before Mrs. Sliderskew, shaking off her more heavy slumbers, knocked at his chamber door; and he had hobbled down-stairs in full array, and smacked his lips over a scanty taste of his favourite cordial, ere that delicate piece of antiquity enlightened the kitchen with her presence.

"Faugh!" said Peg, grubbing, in the discharge of her domestic functions, among a scanty heap of ashes in the rusty grate. "Wedding indeed! A precious wedding! He wants somebody better than his old Peg to take care of him, does he? And what has he said to me, many and many a time, to keep me content with short food, small wages, and little fire? 'My will, Peg! my will!' says he. 'I'm a bachelor—no friends—no relations, Peg.' Lies! And now he's to bring home a new mistress, a baby-faced chit of a girl! If he wanted a wife, the fool, why couldn't he have one suitable to his age, and that knew his ways? She won't come in *my* way, he says. No, that she won't, but you little think why, Arthur boy!"

While Mrs. Sliderskew, influenced possibly by some lingering feelings of disappointment and personal slight, occasioned by her old master's preference for another, was giving loose to these grumblings below-stairs, Arthur Gride was cogitating in the parlour upon what had taken place last night.

"I can't think how he can have picked up what he knows," said Arthur, "unless I have committed myself—let something drop at Bray's, for instance, which has been overheard. Perhaps I may. I shouldn't be surprised if that was it. Mr. Nickleby was often angry at my talking to him before we got outside the door. I mustn't tell him that part of the business, or he'll put me out of sorts, and make me nervous for the day."

Ralph was universally looked up to, and recognised among his fellows as a superior genius, but upon Arthur Gride his stern unyielding character and consummate art had made so deep an impression, that he was actually afraid of him. Cringing and cowardly to the core by nature, Arthur Gride humbled himself in the dust before Ralph Nickleby, and, even when they had not this stake in common, would have licked his shoes and crawled upon the ground before him rather than venture to return him word for word, or retort upon him in any other spirit than one of the most slavish and abject sycophancy.

To Ralph Nickleby's Arthur Gride now betook himself according to appointment; and to Ralph Nickleby he related how, last night, some young blustering blade, whom he had never seen, forced his way into his house, and tried to frighten him from the proposed nuptials: told, in short, what Nicholas had said and done, with the slight reservation upon which he had determined.

"Well, and what then?" said Ralph.

"Oh! nothing more," rejoined Gride.

"He tried to frighten you," said Ralph, "and you *were* frightened I suppose; is that it?"

"I frightened him by crying thieves and murder," replied Gride. "Once I was in earnest, I tell you that, for I had more than half a mind to swear he uttered threats, and demanded my life or my money."

"Oho!" said Ralph, eyeing him askew. "Jealous, too!"

"Dear now, see that!" cried Arthur, rubbing his hands and affecting to laugh.

"Why do you make those grimaces, man?"

said Ralph. "You *are* jealous—and with good cause I think."

"No, no, no,—not with good cause, hey? You don't think with good cause, do you?" cried Arthur, faltering. "Do you, though—hey?"

"Why, how stands the fact?" returned Ralph. "Here is an old man about to be forced in marriage upon a girl; and to this old man there comes a handsome young fellow—— You said he was handsome, didn't you?"

"No!" snarled Arthur Gride.

"Oh!" rejoined Ralph, "I thought you did. Well! Handsome or not handsome, to this old man there comes a young fellow who casts all manner of fierce defiances in his teeth—gums I should rather say—and tells him in plain terms that his mistress hates him. What does he do that for? Philanthropy's sake?"

"Not for love of the lady," replied Gride, "for he said that no word of love—his very words—had ever passed between 'em."

"He said!" repeated Ralph contemptuously. "But I like him for one thing, and that is, his giving you this fair warning to keep your—what is it?—Tit-tit or dainty chick—which?—under lock and key. Be careful, Gride, be careful. It's a triumph, too, to tear her away from a gallant young rival: a great triumph for an old man! It only remains to keep her safe when you have her—that's all."

"What a man it is!" cried Arthur Gride, affecting, in the extremity of his torture, to be highly amused. And then he added anxiously, "Yes; to keep her safe, that's all. And that isn't much, is it?"

"Much!" said Ralph with a sneer. "Why, everybody knows what easy things to understand and to control women are. But come, it's very nearly time for you to be made happy. You'll pay the bond now, I suppose, to save us trouble afterwards?"

"Oh, what a man you are!" croaked Arthur.

"Why not?" said Ralph. "Nobody will pay you interest for the money, I suppose, between this and twelve o'clock, will they?"

"But nobody would pay you interest for it either, you know," returned Arthur, leering at Ralph with all the cunning and slyness he could throw into his face.

"Besides which," said Ralph, suffering his lip to curl into a smile, "you haven't the money about you, and you weren't prepared for this, or you'd have brought it with you; and there's nobody you'd so much like to accommodate as me. I see. We trust each other in about an equal degree. Are you ready?"

Gride, who had done nothing but grin, and nod, and chatter during this last speech of Ralph's, answered in the affirmative; and, producing from his hat a couple of large white favours, pinned one on his breast, and with considerable difficulty induced his friend to do the like. Thus accoutred, they got into a hired coach which Ralph had in waiting, and drove to the residence of the fair and most wretched bride.

Gride, whose spirits and courage had gradually failed him more and more as they approached nearer and nearer to the house, was utterly dismayed and cowed by the mournful silence which pervaded it. The face of the poor servant-girl, the only person they saw, was disfigured with tears and want of sleep. There was nobody to receive or welcome them; and they stole up-stairs into the usual sitting-room more like two burglars than the bridegroom and his friend.

"One would think," said Ralph, speaking, in spite of himself, in a low and subdued voice, "that there was a funeral going on here, and not a wedding."

"He, he!" tittered his friend, "you are so—so very funny!"

"I need be," remarked Ralph drily, "for this is rather dull and chilling. Look a little brisker, man, and not so hang-dog like!"

"Yes, yes, I will," said Gride. "But—but—you don't think she's coming just yet, do you?"

"Why, I suppose she'll not come till she is obliged," returned Ralph, looking at his watch, "and she has a good half-hour to spare yet. Curb your impatience."

"I—I—am not impatient," stammered Arthur. "I wouldn't be hard with her for the world. Oh dear, dear, not on any account! Let her take her time—her own time. Her time shall be ours by all means."

While Ralph bent upon his trembling friend a keen look, which showed that he perfectly understood the reason of this great consideration and regard, a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and Bray himself came into the room on tiptoe, and holding up his hand with a cautious gesture, as if there were some sick person near, who must not be disturbed.

"Hush!" he said in a low voice. "She was very ill last night. I thought she would have broken her heart. She is dressed, and crying bitterly in her own room; but she's better, and quite quiet—that's everything!"

"She is ready, is she?" said Ralph.

"Quite ready," returned the father.

"And not likely to delay us by any young-

lady weaknesses—fainting, or so forth?" said Ralph.

"She may be safely trusted now," returned Bray. "I have been talking to her this morning. Here—come a little this way."

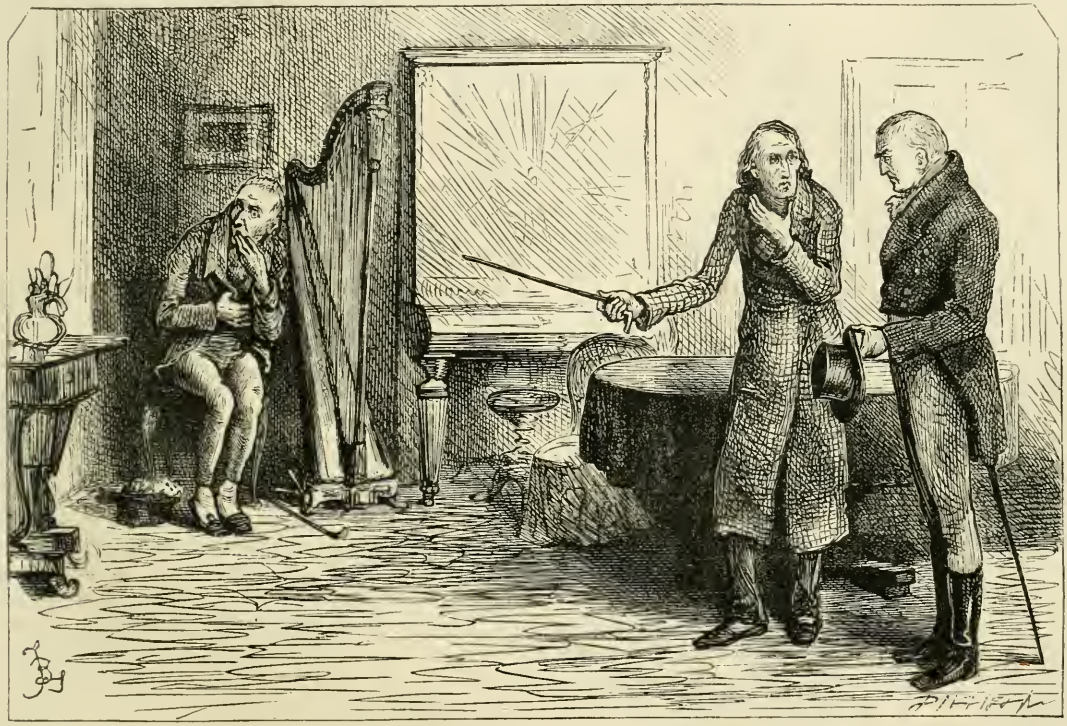
He drew Ralph Nickleby to the further end of the room, and pointed towards Gride, who sat huddled together in a corner, fumbling nervously with the buttons of his coat, and exhibiting a face, of which every skulking and base expression was sharpened and aggravated to the utmost by his anxiety and trepidation.

"Look at that man," whispered Bray emphatically. "This seems a cruel thing, after all."

"What seems a cruel thing?" inquired Ralph with as much stolidity of face as if he really were in utter ignorance of the other's meaning.

"This marriage," answered Bray. "Don't ask me what. You know as well as I do."

Ralph shrugged his shoulders, in silent deprecation of Bray's impatience, and elevated his eyebrows, and pursed his lips, as men do when they are prepared with a sufficient answer to



"HE DREW RALPH NICKLEBY TO THE FURTHER END OF THE ROOM, AND POINTED TOWARDS GRIDE, WHO SAT HUDDLED TOGETHER IN A CORNER, FUMBLING NERVOUSLY WITH THE BUTTONS OF HIS COAT, AND EXHIBITING A FACE, OF WHICH EVERY SKULKING AND BASE EXPRESSION WAS SHARPENED AND AGGRAVATED TO THE UTMOST BY HIS ANXIETY AND TREPIDATION."

some remark, but wait for a more favourable opportunity of advancing it, or think it scarcely worth while to answer their adversary at all.

"Look at him. Does it not seem cruel?" said Bray.

"No!" replied Ralph boldly.

"I say it does," retorted Bray with a show of much irritation. "It is a cruel thing, by all that's bad and treacherous!"

When men are about to commit, or to sanction the commission, of some injustice, it is not uncommon for them to express pity for the object either of that or some parallel proceeding, and to feel themselves, at the time, quite virtuous and moral, and immensely superior to those who express no pity at all. This is a kind of upholding of faith above works, and is very comfortable. To do Ralph Nickleby justice, he seldom practised this sort of dissimulation; but he understood those who did, and therefore suffered Bray to say, again and again, with great vehemence, that they were jointly doing a very

cruel thing, before he again offered to interpose a word.

"You see what a dry, shrivelled, withered old chip it is," returned Ralph when the other was at length silent. "If he were younger, it might be cruel, but as it is—harkee, Mr. Bray, he'll die soon, and leave her a rich young widow! Miss Madeline consults your tastes this time; let her consult her own next."

"True, true," said Bray, biting his nails, and plainly very ill at ease. "I couldn't do anything better for her than advise her to accept these proposals, could I? Now, I ask you, Nickleby, as a man of the world—could I?"

"Surely not," answered Ralph. "I tell you what, sir; there are a hundred fathers, within a circuit of five miles from this place; well off; good, rich, substantial men; who would gladly give their daughters, and their own ears with them, to that very man yonder, ape and mummy as he looks."

"So there are!" exclaimed Bray, eagerly catching at anything which seemed a justification of himself. "And so I told her, both last night and to-day."

"You told her truth," said Ralph, "and did well to do so; though I must say, at the same time, that if I had a daughter, and my freedom, pleasure, nay, my very health and life, depended on her taking a husband whom I pointed out, I should hope it would not be necessary to advance any other arguments to induce her to consent to my wishes."

Bray looked at Ralph as if to see whether he spoke in earnest, and, having nodded twice or thrice in unqualified assent to what had fallen from him, said:

"I must go up-stairs for a few minutes, to finish dressing. When I come down I'll bring Madeline with me. Do you know, I had a very strange dream last night, which I have not remembered till this instant. I dreamt that it was this morning, and you and I had been talking as we have been this minute; that I went up-stairs, for the very purpose for which I am going now; and that, as I stretched out my hand to take Madeline's, and lead her down, the floor sunk with me, and, after falling from such an indescribable and tremendous height as the imagination scarcely conceives, except in dreams, I alighted in a grave."

"And you awoke, and found you were lying on your back, or with your head hanging over the bedside, or suffering some pain from indigestion?" said Ralph. "Pshaw, Mr. Bray, do as I do (you will have the opportunity, now that a constant round of pleasure and enjoyment opens upon you), and, occupying yourself a little more by day, have no time to think of what you dream by night."

Ralph followed him with a steady look to the door; and, turning to the bridegroom when they were again alone, said:

"Mark my words, Gride, you won't have to pay *his* annuity very long. You have the devil's luck in bargains always. If he is not booked to make the long voyage before many months are past and gone, I wear an orange for a head!"

To this prophecy, so agreeable to his ears, Arthur returned no answer than a cackle of great delight. Ralph, throwing himself into a chair, they both sat waiting in profound silence. Ralph was thinking, with a sneer upon his lips, on the altered manner of Bray that day, and how soon their fellowship in a bad design had lowered his pride and established a familiarity between them, when his attentive ear caught the rustling of a female dress upon the stairs, and the footstep of a man.

"Wake up," he said, stamping his foot impatiently upon the ground, "and be something like life, man, will you? They are here. Urge those dry old bones of yours this way—quick, man, quick!"

Gride shambled forward, and stood, leering and bowing, close by Ralph's side, when the door opened, and there entered in haste—not Bray and his daughter, but Nicholas and his sister Kate.

If some tremendous apparition from the world of shadows had suddenly presented itself before him, Ralph Nickleby could not have been more thunder-stricken than he was by this surprise. His hands fell powerless by his side, he reeled back; and with open mouth, and a face of ashy paleness, stood gazing at them in speechless rage: his eyes so prominent, and his face so convulsed and changed by the passions which raged within him, that it would have been difficult to recognise in him the same stern, composed, hard-featured man he had been not a minute ago.

"The man that came to me last night," whispered Gride, plucking at his elbow. "The man that came to me last night!"

"I see," muttered Ralph, "I know! I might have guessed as much before. Across my every path, at every turn, go where I will, do what I may, he comes!"

The absence of all colour from the face; the dilated nostril; the quivering of the lips which, though set firmly against each other, would not be still; showed what emotions were struggling

for the mastery with Nicholas. But he kept them down, and, gently pressing Kate's arm to reassure her, stood erect and undaunted, front to front with his unworthy relative.

As the brother and sister stood side by side, with a gallant bearing which became them well, a close likeness between them was apparent, which many, had they only seen them apart, might have failed to remark. The air, carriage, and very look and expression of the brother were all reflected in the sister, but softened and refined to the nicest limit of feminine delicacy and attraction. More striking still was some indefinable resemblance, in the face of Ralph, to both. While they had never looked more handsome, nor he more ugly; while they had never held themselves more proudly, nor he shrunk half so low; there never had been a time when this resemblance was so perceptible, or when all the worst characteristics of a face rendered coarse and harsh by evil thoughts were half so manifest as now.

"Away!" was the first word he could utter as he literally gnashed his teeth. "Away! What brings you here? Liar—scoundrel—dastard—thief!"

"I come here," said Nicholas in a low deep voice, "to save your victim if I can. Liar and scoundrel you are, in every action of your life; theft is your trade; and double dastard you must be, or you were not here to-day. Hard words will not move me, nor would hard blows. Here I stand, and will, till I have done my errand."

"Girl!" said Ralph, "retire! We can use force to him, but I would not hurt you if I could help it. Retire, you weak and silly wench, and leave this dog to be dealt with as he deserves."

"I will not retire," cried Kate with flashing eyes, and the red blood mantling in her cheeks. "You will do him no hurt that he will not repay. You may use force with me; I think you will, for I *am* a girl, and that would well become you. But, if I have a girl's weakness, I have a woman's heart, and it is not you who in a cause like this can turn that from its purpose."

"And what may your purpose be, most lofty lady?" said Ralph.

"To offer to the unhappy subject of your treachery, at this last moment," replied Nicholas, "a refuge and a home. If the near prospect of such a husband as you have provided will not prevail upon her, I hope she may be moved by the prayers and entreaties of one of her own sex. At all events, they shall be tried. I myself, avowing to her father from whom I come and by whom I am commissioned, will render it an act of greater baseness, meanness, and cruelty in him if he still dares to force this marriage on. Here I wait to see him and his daughter. For this I came and brought my sister even into your presence. Our purpose is not to see or speak with you; therefore to you we stoop to say no more."

"Indeed!" said Ralph. "You persist in remaining here, ma'am, do you?"

His niece's bosom heaved with the indignant excitement into which he had lashed her, but she gave him no reply.

"Now, Gride, see here," said Ralph. "This fellow—I grieve to say, my brother's son: a reprobate and profligate, stained with every mean and selfish crime—this fellow, coming here to-day to disturb a solemn ceremony, and knowing that the consequence of his presenting himself in another man's house at such a time, and persisting in remaining there, must be his being kicked into the streets and dragged through them like the vagabond he is—this fellow, mark you, brings with him his sister as a protection, thinking we would not expose a silly girl to the degradation and indignity which is no novelty to him; and, even after I have warned her of what must ensue, he still keeps her by him, as you see, and clings to her apron-strings like a cowardly boy to his mother's. Is not this a pretty fellow to talk as big as you have heard him now?"

"And as I heard him last night," said Arthur Gride; "as I heard him last night, when he sneaked into my house, and—he! he! he!—very soon sneaked out again, when I nearly frightened him to death. And *he* wanting to marry Miss Madeline too! Oh dear! Is there anything else he'd like—anything else we can do for him, besides giving her up? Would he like his debts paid and his house furnished, and a few bank notes for shaving paper, if he shaves at all? He! he! he!"

"You will remain, girl, will you?" said Ralph, turning upon Kate again, "to be hauled downstairs like a drunken drab—as I swear you shall if you stop here? No answer! Thank your brother for what follows. Gride, call down Bray—and not his daughter. Let them keep her above."

"If you value your head," said Nicholas, taking up a position before the door, and speaking in the same low voice in which he had spoken before, and with no more outward passion than he had before displayed; "stay where you are!"

"Mind me, and not him, and call down Bray," said Ralph.

"Mind yourself rather than either of us, and stay where you are!" said Nicholas.

"Will you call down Bray?" cried Ralph.

"Remember that you come near me at your peril," said Nicholas.

Gride hesitated. Ralph being, by this time, as furious as a baffled tiger, made for the door, and, attempting to pass Kate, clasped her arm roughly with his hand. Nicholas, with his eyes darting fire, seized him by the collar. At that moment a heavy body fell with great violence on the floor above, and, in an instant afterwards, was heard a most appalling and terrific scream.

They all stood still, and gazed upon each other. Scream succeeded scream; a heavy pattering of feet succeeded; and many shrill voices clamouring together were heard to cry, "He is dead!"

"Stand off!" cried Nicholas, letting loose all the passion he had restrained till now. "If this is what I scarcely dare to hope it is, you are caught, villains, in your own toils."

He burst from the room, and, darting up-stairs to the quarter from whence the noise proceeded, forced his way through a crowd of persons who quite filled a small bedchamber, and found Bray lying on the floor quite dead; his daughter clinging to the body.

"How did this happen?" he cried, looking wildly about him.

Several voices answered together that he had been observed, through the half-opened door, reclining in a strange and uneasy position upon a chair; that he had been spoken to several times, and, not answering, was supposed to be asleep, until some person going in and shaking him by the arm, he fell heavily to the ground, and was discovered to be dead.

"Who is the owner of this house?" said Nicholas hastily.

An elderly woman was pointed out to him; and to her he said, as he knelt down and gently unwound Madeline's arms from the lifeless mass round which they were entwined: "I represent this lady's nearest friends, as her servant here knows, and must remove her from this dreadful scene. This is my sister to whose charge you confide her. My name and address are upon that card, and you shall receive from me all necessary directions for the arrangements that must be made. Stand aside, every one of you, and give me room and air for God's sake!"

The people fell back, scarce wondering more at what had just occurred than at the excitement and impetuosity of him who spoke. Nicholas, taking the insensible girl in his arms, bore her from the chamber, and down-stairs into the room he had just quitted, followed by his sister and the faithful servant, whom he charged to procure a coach directly, while he and Kate bent over their beautiful charge, and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her to animation. The girl performed her office with such expedition, that in a very few minutes the coach was ready.

Ralph Nickleby and Gride, stunned and paralysed by the awful event which had so suddenly overthrown their schemes (it would not otherwise, perhaps, have made much impression on them), and carried away by the extraordinary energy and precipitation of Nicholas, which bore down all before him, looked on at these proceedings like men in a dream or trance. It was not until every preparation was made for Madeline's immediate removal that Ralph broke silence by declaring she should not be taken away.

"Who says so?" cried Nicholas, rising from his knee and confronting them, but still retaining Madeline's lifeless hand in his.

"I!" answered Ralph hoarsely.

"Hush, hush!" cried the terrified Gride, catching him by the arm again. "Hear what he says."

"Ay!" said Nicholas, extending his disengaged hand in the air, "hear what he says. That both your debts are paid in the one great debt of nature—that the bond, due to-day at twelve, is now waste paper—that your contemplated fraud shall be discovered yet—that your schemes are known to man, and overthrown by Heaven—wretches, that he defies you both to do your worst!"

"This man," said Ralph in a voice scarcely intelligible, "this man claims his wife, and he shall have her."

"That man claims what is not his, and he should not have her if he were fifty men, with fifty more to back him," said Nicholas.

"Who shall prevent him?"

"I will."

"By what right I should like to know," said Ralph. "By what right I ask?"

"By this right—that, knowing what I do, you dare not tempt me further," said Nicholas; "and by this better right—that those I serve, and with whom you would have done me base wrong and injury, are her nearest and her dearest friends. In their name I bear her hence. Give way!"

"One word!" cried Ralph, foaming at the mouth.

"Not one," replied Nicholas, "I will not hear of one—save this. Look to yourself, and heed this warning that I give you! Your day is past, and night is coming on——"

"My curse, my bitter, deadly curse, upon you, boy!"

"Whence will curses come at your command? or what avails a curse or blessing from a man like you? I tell you that misfortune and discovery are thickening about your head; that the structures you have raised, through all your ill-spent life, are crumbling into dust; that your path is beset with spies; that this very day ten thousand pounds of your hoarded wealth have gone in one great crash!"

"'Tis false!" cried Ralph, shrinking back.

"'Tis true, and you shall find it so. I have no more words to waste. Stand from the door! Kate, do you go first. Lay not a hand on her, or on that woman, or on me, or so much as brush their garments as they pass you by!—You let them pass, and he blocks the door again!"

Arthur Gride happened to be in the doorway, but whether intentionally or from confusion was not quite apparent. Nicholas swung him away with such violence as to cause him to spin round the room until he was caught by a sharp angle of the wall, and there knocked down; and then, taking his beautiful burden in his arms, rushed out. No one cared to stop him, if any were so disposed. Making his way through a mob of people, whom a report of the circumstances had attracted round the house, and carrying Madeline, in his excitement, as easily as if she were an infant, he reached the coach in which Kate and the girl were already waiting, and, confiding his charge to them, jumped up beside the coachman, and bade him drive away.

CHAPTER LV.

OF FAMILY MATTERS, CARES, HOPES, DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND SORROWS.

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Nickleby had been made acquainted by her son and daughter with every circumstance of Madeline Bray's history which was known to them; although the responsible situation in which Nicholas stood had been carefully explained to her, and she had been prepared, even for the possible contingency of having to receive the young lady in her own house—improbable as such a result had appeared only a few minutes before it came about—still, Mrs. Nickleby, from the moment when this confidence was first reposed in her, late on the previous evening, had remained in an unsatisfactory and profoundly mystified state, from which no explanations or arguments could relieve her, and which every fresh soliloquy and reflection only aggravated more and more.

"Bless my heart, Kate!" so the good lady argued; "if the Mr. Cheerybles don't want this young lady to be married, why don't they file a bill against the Lord Chancellor, make her a Chancery ward, and shut her up in the Fleet Prison for safety?—I have read of such things in the newspapers a hundred times—or, if they are so very fond of her as Nicholas says they are, why don't they marry her themselves—one of them I mean? And even supposing they don't want her to be married, and don't want to marry her themselves, why in the name of wonder should Nicholas go about the world forbidding people's banns?"

"I don't think you quite understand," said Kate gently.

"Well I am sure, Kate, my dear, you're very polite!" replied Mrs. Nickleby. "I have been married myself I hope, and I have seen other people married. Not understand, indeed!"

"I know you have had great experience, dear mamma," said Kate; "I mean that perhaps you don't quite understand all the circumstances in this instance. We have stated them awkwardly, I dare say."

"That I dare say you have," retorted her mother briskly. "That's very likely. I am not to be held accountable for that; though, at the same time, as the circumstances speak for themselves, I shall take the liberty, my love, of saying that I do understand them, and perfectly well too; whatever you and Nicholas may choose to think to the contrary. Why is such a great fuss made because this Miss Magdalen is going to marry somebody who is older than herself? Your poor papa was older than I was—four years and a half older. Jane Dibabs—the Dibabses lived in the beautiful little thatched white house one story high, covered all over with ivy and creeping plants, with an exquisite little porch with twining honeysuckles and all sorts of things: where the earwigs used to fall into one's tea on a summer evening, and always fell upon their backs, and kicked dreadfully, and where the frogs used to get into the rushlight shades when one stopped all night, and sit up and look through the little holes like Christians—Jane Dibabs, *she* married a man who was a great deal older than herself, and *would* marry him, notwithstanding all that could be said to the contrary, and she was so fond of him that nothing was ever equal to it. There was no fuss made about Jane Dibabs, and her husband was

a most honourable and excellent man, and everybody spoke well of him. Then why should there be any fuss about this Magdalen?"

"Her husband is much older; he is not her own choice; his character is the very reverse of that which you have just described. Don't you see a broad distinction between the two cases?" said Kate.

To this Mrs. Nickleby only replied that she durst say she was very stupid, indeed, she had no doubt she was, for her own children almost as much as told her so, every day of her life. To be sure she was a little older than they, and perhaps some foolish people might think she ought reasonably to know best. However, no doubt she was wrong; of course she was—she always was—she couldn't be right, indeed—couldn't be expected to be—so she had better not expose herself any more; and to all Kate's conciliations and concessions, for an hour ensuing, the good lady gave no other replies than—Oh, certainly!—why did they ask *her*?—*her* opinion was of no consequence—it didn't matter what *she* said—with many other rejoinders of the same class.

In this frame of mind (expressed, when she had become too resigned for speech, by nods of the head, upliftings of the eyes, and little beginnings of groans, converted, as they attracted attention, into short coughs) Mrs. Nickleby remained until Nicholas and Kate returned with the object of their solicitude; when, having by this time asserted her own importance, and becoming, besides, interested in the trials of one so young and beautiful, she not only displayed the utmost zeal and solicitude, but took great credit to herself for recommending the course of procedure which her son had adopted: frequently declaring, with an expressive look, that it was very fortunate things were *as* they were: and hinting that, but for great encouragement and wisdom on her own part, they never could have been brought to that pass.

Not to strain the question whether Mrs. Nickleby had or had not any great hand in bringing matters about, it is unquestionable that she had strong ground for exultation. The brothers, on their return, bestowed such commendations on Nicholas for the part he had taken, and evinced so much joy at the altered state of events, and the recovery of their young friend from trials so great and dangers so threatening, that, as she more than once informed her daughter, she now considered the fortunes of the family "as good as" made. Mr. Charles Cheeryble, indeed, Mrs. Nickleby positively asserted, had, in the first transports of his surprise and delight, "as good as" said so. Without precisely explaining what this qualification meant, she subsided, whenever she mentioned the subject, into such a mysterious and important state, and had such visions of wealth and dignity in perspective, that (vague and clouded though they were) she was, at such times, almost as happy as if she had really been permanently provided for on a scale of great splendour.

The sudden and terrible shock she had received, combined with the great affliction and anxiety of mind which she had, for a long time, endured, proved too much for Madeline's strength. Recovering from the state of stupefaction into which the sudden death of her father happily plunged her, she only exchanged that condition for one of dangerous and active illness. When the delicate physical powers which have been sustained by an unnatural strain upon the mental energies, and a resolute determination not to yield, at last give way, their degree of prostration is usually proportionate to the strength of the effort which has previously upheld them. Thus it was that the illness which fell on Madeline was of no slight or temporary nature, but one which, for a time, threatened her reason, and—scarcely worse—her life itself.

Who, slowly recovering from a disorder so severe and dangerous, could be insensible to the unremitting attentions of such a nurse as gentle, tender, earnest Kate? On whom could the sweet soft voice, the light step, the delicate hand, the quiet, cheerful, noiseless discharge of those thousand little offices of kindness and relief which we feel so deeply when we are ill, and forget so lightly when we are well—on whom could they make so deep an impression as on a young heart stored with every pure and true affection that women cherish; almost a stranger to the endearments and devotion of its own sex, save as it learnt them from itself; and rendered, by calamity and suffering, keenly susceptible of the sympathy so long unknown and so long sought in vain? What wonder that days became as years in knitting them together? What wonder if, with every hour of returning health, there came some stronger and sweeter recognition of the praises which Kate, when they recalled old scenes—they seemed old now, and to have been acted years ago—would lavish on her brother? Where would have been the wonder, even, if those praises had found a quick response in the breast of Madeline, and if, with the image of Nicholas so constantly recurring in the features of his sister that she could scarcely separate the two, she had sometimes found it equally difficult to assign to each

the feelings they had first inspired, and had imperceptibly mingled with her gratitude to Nicholas some of that warmer feeling which she had assigned to Kate?

"My dear," Mrs. Nickleby would say, coming into the room with an elaborate caution, calculated to discompose the nerves of an invalid rather more than the entry of a horse-soldier at full gallop; "how do you find yourself to-night? I hope you are better."

"Almost well, mamma," Kate would reply, laying down her work, and taking Madeline's hand in hers.

"Kate!" Mrs. Nickleby would say reprovingly, "don't talk so loud" (the worthy lady herself talking in a whisper that would have made the blood of the stoutest man run cold in his veins).

Kate would take this reproof very quietly, and Mrs. Nickleby, making every board creak and every thread rustle as she moved stealthily about, would add:

"My son Nicholas has just come home, and I have come, according to custom, my dear, to know, from your own lips, exactly how you are; for he won't take my account, and never will."

"He is later than usual to-night," perhaps Madeline would reply. "Nearly half an hour."

"Well, I never saw such people in all my life as you are, for time, up here!" Mrs. Nickleby would exclaim in great astonishment; "I declare I never did! I had not the least idea that Nicholas was after his time—not the smallest. Mr. Nickleby used to say—your poor papa I am speaking of, Kate, my dear—used to say that appetite was the best clock in the world, but you have no appetite, my dear Miss Bray, I wish you had, and upon my word I really think you ought to take something that would give you one. I am sure I don't know, but I have heard that two or three dozen native lobsters give an appetite, though that comes to the same thing after all, for I suppose you must have an appetite before you can take 'em. If I said lobsters, I meant oysters, but of course it's all the same, though really how you came to know about Nicholas——"

"We happened to be just talking about him, mamma; that was it."

"You never seem to me to be talking about anything else, Kate, and upon my word I am quite surprised at your being so very thoughtless. You can find subjects enough to talk about sometimes, and when you know how important it is to keep up Miss Bray's spirits, and interest her, and all that, it really is quite extraordinary to me what can induce you to keep on prose, prose, prose, din, din, din, everlastingly upon the same theme. You are a very kind nurse, Kate, and a very good one, and I know you mean very well; but I will say this—that, if it wasn't for me, I really don't know what would become of Miss Bray's spirits, and so I tell the doctor every day. He says he wonders how I sustain my own, and I am sure I very often wonder myself how I can contrive to keep up as I do. Of course it's an exertion, but still, when I know how much depends upon me in this house, I am obliged to make it. There's nothing praiseworthy in that, but it's necessary, and I do it."

With that, Mrs. Nickleby would draw up a chair, and for some three-quarters of an hour run through a great variety of distracting topics in the most distracting manner possible: tearing herself away, at length, on the plea that she must now go and amuse Nicholas while he took his supper. After a preliminary raising of his spirits with the information that she considered the patient decidedly worse, she would further cheer him up by relating how dull, listless, and low-spirited Miss Bray was, because Kate foolishly talked about nothing else but him and family matters. When she had made Nicholas thoroughly comfortable with these and other inspiriting remarks, she would discourse at length on the arduous duties she had performed that day; and sometimes be moved to tears in wondering how, if anything were to happen to herself, the family would ever get on without her.

At other times, when Nicholas came home at night, he would be accompanied by Mr. Frank Cheeryble, who was commissioned by the brothers to inquire how Madeline was that evening. On such occasions (and they were of very frequent occurrence) Mrs. Nickleby deemed it of particular importance that she should have her wits about her; for, from certain signs and tokens which had attracted her attention, she shrewdly suspected that Mr. Frank, interested as his uncles were in Madeline, came quite as much to see Kate as to inquire after her; the more especially as the brothers were in constant communication with the medical man, came backwards and forwards very frequently themselves, and received a full report from Nicholas every morning. These were proud times for Mrs. Nickleby; never was anybody half so discreet and sage as she, or half so mysterious withal; and never were there such cunning generalship and such unfathomable designs as she brought to bear upon Mr. Frank, with the view of ascertaining whether her suspicions were

well founded: and if so, of tantalising him into taking her into his confidence, and throwing himself upon her merciful consideration. Extensive was the artillery, heavy and light, which Mrs. Nickleby brought into play for the furtherance of these great schemes: various and opposite the means which she employed to bring about the end she had in view. At one time she was all cordiality and ease; at another, all stiffness and frigidity. Now she would seem to open her whole heart to her unhappy victim; the next time they met, she would receive him with the most distant and studious reserve, as if a new light had broken in upon her, and, guessing his intentions, she had resolved to check them in the bud; as if she felt it her bounden duty to act with Spartan firmness, and at once and for ever to discourage hopes which never could be realised. At other times, when Nicholas was not there to overhear, and Kate was up-stairs busily tending her sick friend, the worthy lady would throw out dark hints of an intention to send her daughter to France for three or four years, or to Scotland for the improvement of her health impaired by her late fatigues, or to America on a visit, or anywhere that threatened a long and tedious separation. Nay, she even went so far as to hint obscurely at an attachment entertained for her daughter by the son of an old neighbour of theirs, one Horatio Peltirogus (a young gentleman who might have been, at that time, four years old, or thereabouts), and to represent it, indeed, as almost a settled thing between the families—only waiting for her daughter's final decision, to come off with the sanction of the church, and to the unspeakable happiness and content of all parties.

It was in the full pride and glory of having sprung this last mine one night with extraordinary success, that Mrs. Nickleby took the opportunity of being left alone with her son before retiring to rest, to sound him on the subject which so occupied her thoughts: not doubting that they could have but one opinion respecting it. To this end, she approached the question with divers laudatory and appropriate remarks touching the general amiability of Mr. Frank Cheeryble.

"You are quite right, mother," said Nicholas, "quite right. He is a fine fellow."

"Good-looking, too," said Mrs. Nickleby.

"Decidedly good-looking," answered Nicholas.

"What may you call his nose, now, my dear?" pursued Mrs. Nickleby, wishing to interest Nicholas in the subject to the utmost.

"Call it?" repeated Nicholas.

"Ah!" returned his mother, "what style of nose? What order of architecture, if one may say so? I am not very learned in noses. Do you call it a Roman or a Grecian?"

"Upon my word, mother," said Nicholas, laughing, "as well as I remember, I should call it a kind of Composite, or mixed nose. But I have no very strong recollection on the subject. If it will afford you any gratification, I'll observe it more closely, and let you know."

"I wish you would, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby with an earnest look.

"Very well," returned Nicholas. "I will."

Nicholas returned to the perusal of the book he had been reading when the dialogue had gone thus far. Mrs. Nickleby, after stopping a little for consideration, resumed.

"He is very much attached to you, Nicholas, my dear."

Nicholas laughingly said, as he closed his book, that he was glad to hear it, and observed that his mother seemed deep in their new friend's confidence already.

"Hem!" said Mrs. Nickleby. "I don't know about that, my dear, but I think it is very necessary that somebody should be in his confidence—highly necessary."

Elated by a look of curiosity from her son, and the consciousness of possessing a great secret all to herself, Mrs. Nickleby went on with great animation:

"I am sure, my dear Nicholas, how you can have failed to notice it is, to me, quite extraordinary; though I don't know why I should say that, either, because, of course, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent, there is a great deal in this sort of thing, especially in this early stage, which, however clear it may be to females, can scarcely be expected to be so evident to men. I don't say that I have any particular penetration in such matters. I may have; those about me should know best about that, and perhaps do know. Upon that point I shall express no opinion—it wouldn't become me to do so—it's quite out of the question—quite."

Nicholas snuffed the candles, put his hands in his pockets, and, leaning back in his chair, assumed a look of patient suffering and melancholy resignation.

"I think it my duty, Nicholas, my dear," resumed his mother, "to tell you what I know: not only because you have a right to know it too, and to know everything that happens in this family, but because you have it in your power to promote and assist the thing very much; and there is no doubt that, the sooner one can come to a clear understanding on such

subjects, it is always better, every way. There are a great many things you might do; such as taking a walk in the garden sometimes, or sitting up-stairs in your own room for a little while, or making believe to fall asleep occasionally, or pretending that you recollected some business, and going out for an hour or so, and taking Mr. Smike with you. These seem very slight things, and I dare say you will be amused at my making them of so much importance; at the same time, my dear, I can assure you (and you'll find this out, Nicholas, for yourself one of these days, if you ever fall in love with anybody: as I trust and hope you will, provided she is respectable and well conducted, and of course you'd never dream of falling in love with anybody who was not), I say, I can assure you that a great deal more depends upon these little things than you would suppose possible. If your poor papa was alive, he would tell you how much depended on the parties being left alone. Of course you are not to go out of the room as if you meant it, and did it on purpose, but as if it was quite an accident, and to come back again in the same way. If you cough in the passage before you open the door, or whistle carelessly, or hum a tune, or something of that sort, to let them know you're coming, it's always better; because, of course, though it's not only natural, but perfectly correct and proper under the circumstances, still it is very confusing if you interrupt young people when they are—when they are sitting on the sofa, and—and all that sort of thing: which is very nonsensical, perhaps, but still they will do it."

The profound astonishment with which her son regarded her during this long address, gradually increasing as it approached its climax, in no way discomposed Mrs. Nickleby, but rather exalted her opinion of her own cleverness; therefore, merely stopping to remark, with much complacency, that she had fully expected him to be surprised, she entered on a vast quantity of circumstantial evidence of a particularly incoherent and perplexing kind; the upshot of which was to establish, beyond the possibility of doubt, that Mr. Frank Cheeryble had fallen desperately in love with Kate.

"With whom?" cried Nicholas.

Mrs. Nickleby repeated, with Kate.

"What! *our* Kate—my sister!"

"Lord, Nicholas!" returned Mrs. Nickleby, "whose Kate should it be, if not ours; or what should I care about it, or take any interest in it for, if it was anybody but your sister?"

"Dear mother," said Nicholas, "surely it can't be!"

"Very good, my dear," replied Mrs. Nickleby with great confidence. "Wait and see."

Nicholas had never, until that moment, bestowed a thought upon the remote possibility of such an occurrence as that which was now communicated to him; for, besides that he had been much from home of late and closely occupied with other matters, his own jealous fears had prompted the suspicion that some secret interest in Madeline, akin to that which he felt himself, occasioned those visits of Frank Cheeryble which had recently become so frequent. Even now, although he knew that the observation of an anxious mother was much more likely to be correct in such a case than his own, and although she reminded him of many little circumstances which, taken together, were certainly susceptible of the construction she triumphantly put upon them, he was not quite convinced but that they arose from mere good-natured thoughtless gallantry, which would have dictated the same conduct towards any other girl who was young and pleasing. At all events, he hoped so, and therefore tried to believe it.

"I am very much disturbed by what you tell me," said Nicholas after a little reflection, "though I yet hope you may be mistaken."

"I don't understand why you should hope so," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I confess; but you may depend upon it I am not."

"What of Kate?" inquired Nicholas.

"Why, that, my dear," returned Mrs. Nickleby, "is just the point upon which I am not yet satisfied. During this sickness she has been constantly at Madeline's bedside—never were two people so fond of each other as they have grown—and, to tell you the truth, Nicholas, I have rather kept her away now and then, because I think it's a good plan, and urges a young man on. He doesn't get too sure, you know."

She said this with such a mingling of high delight and self-congratulation, that it was inexpressibly painful to Nicholas to dash her hopes; but he felt that there was only one honourable course before him, and that he was bound to take it.

"Dear mother," he said kindly, "don't you see that if there were really any serious inclination on the part of Mr. Frank towards Kate, and we suffered ourselves for a moment to encourage it, we should be acting a most dishonourable and ungrateful part? I ask you if you don't see it, but I need not say that I know you don't, or you would have been more strictly on your guard. Let me explain my meaning to you. Remember how poor we are."

Mrs. Nickleby shook her head, and said,

through her tears, that poverty was not a crime.

"No," said Nicholas, "and for that reason poverty should engender an honest pride, that it may not lead and tempt us to unworthy actions, and that we may preserve the self-respect which a hewer of wood and drawer of water may maintain—and does better in maintaining than a monarch in preserving his. Think what we owe to these two brothers: remember what they have done, and what they do every day for us, with a generosity and delicacy for which the devotion of our whole lives would be a most imperfect and inadequate return. What kind of return would that be which would be comprised in our permitting their nephew, their only relative, whom they regard as a son, and for whom it would be mere childishness to suppose they have not formed plans suitably adapted to the education he has had, and the fortune he will inherit—in our permitting him to marry a portionless girl: so closely connected with us, that the irresistible inference must be, that he was entrapped by a plot; that it was a deliberate scheme, and a speculation amongst us three? Bring the matter clearly before yourself, mother. Now, how would you feel, if they were married, and the brothers, coming here on one of those kind errands which bring them here so often, you had to break out to them the truth? Would you be at ease, and feel that you had played an open part?"

Poor Mrs. Nickleby, crying more and more, murmured that of course Mr. Frank would ask the consent of his uncles first.

"Why, to be sure that would place *him* in a better situation with them," said Nicholas, "but we should still be open to the same suspicions; the distance between us would still be as great; the advantages to be gained would still be as manifest as now. We may be reckoning without our host in all this," he added more cheerfully, "and I trust, and almost believe, we are. If it be otherwise, I have that confidence in Kate that I know she will feel as I do—and in you, dear mother, to be assured that, after a little consideration, you will do the same."

After many more representations and entreaties, Nicholas obtained a promise from Mrs. Nickleby that she would try all she could to think as he did; and that, if Mr. Frank persevered in his attentions, she would endeavour to discourage them, or, at the least, would render him no countenance or assistance. He determined to forbear mentioning the subject to Kate until he was quite convinced that there existed a real necessity for his doing so; and resolved to assure himself, as well as he could by close personal observation, of the exact position of affairs. This was a very wise resolution, but he was prevented from putting it in practice by a new source of anxiety and uneasiness.

Smike became alarmingly ill; so reduced and exhausted, that he could scarcely move from room to room without assistance; and so worn and emaciated, that it was painful to look upon him. Nicholas was warned, by the same medical authority to whom he had at first appealed, that the last chance and hope of his life depended on his being instantly removed from London. That part of Devonshire in which Nicholas had been himself bred was named as the most favourable spot; but this advice was cautiously coupled with the information, that whoever accompanied him thither must be prepared for the worst; for every token of rapid consumption had appeared, and he might never return alive.

The kind brothers, who were acquainted with the poor creature's sad history, dispatched old Tim to be present at this consultation. That same morning Nicholas was summoned by brother Charles into his private room, and thus addressed:

"My dear sir, no time must be lost. This lad shall not die, if such human means as we can use can save his life; neither shall he die alone, and in a strange place. Remove him to-morrow morning, see that he has every comfort that his situation requires, and don't leave him—don't leave him, my dear sir, until you know that there is no longer any immediate danger. It would be hard, indeed, to part you now—no, no, no! Tim shall wait upon you to-night, sir; Tim shall wait upon you to-night with a parting word or two. Brother Ned, my dear fellow, Mr. Nickleby waits to shake hands and say good-bye; Mr. Nickleby won't be long gone; this poor chap will soon get better—very soon get better—and then he'll find out some nice homely country-people to leave him with, and will go backwards and forwards sometimes—backwards and forwards you know, Ned—and there's no cause to be down-hearted, for he'll very soon get better, very soon, won't he—won't he, Ned?"

What Tim Linkinwater said, or what he brought with him that night, needs not to be told. Next morning Nicholas and his feeble companion began their journey.

And who but one—and that one he who, but for those who crowded round him then, had never met a look of kindness, or known a word of pity—could tell what agony of mind, what blighted thoughts, what unavailing sorrow, were involved in that sad parting?

"See," cried Nicholas eagerly as he looked from the coach window, "they are at the corner of the lane still! And now there's Kate—poor Kate, whom you said you couldn't bear to say good-bye to—waving her handkerchief. Don't go without one gesture of farewell to Kate!"

"I cannot make it!" cried his trembling companion, falling back in his seat and covering his eyes. "Do you see her now? Is she there still?"

"Yes, yes!" said Nicholas earnestly. "There! She waves her hand again! I have answered it for you—and now they are out of sight. Do not give way so bitterly, dear friend, don't. You will meet them all again."

He whom he thus encouraged raised his withered hands, and clasped them fervently together.

"In heaven—I humbly pray to God, in heaven."

It sounded like the prayer of a broken heart.

CHAPTER LVI.

RALPH NICKLEBY, BAFFLED BY HIS NEPHEW IN HIS LATE DESIGN, HATCHES A SCHEME OF RETALIATION WHICH ACCIDENT SUGGESTS TO HIM, AND TAKES INTO HIS COUNSELS A TRIED AUXILIARY.

THE course which these adventures shape out for themselves, and imperatively call upon the historian to observe, now demands that they should revert to the point they attained previously to the commencement of the last chapter, when Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride were left together in the house where death had so suddenly reared his dark and heavy banner.

With clenched hands, and teeth ground together so firm and tight that no locking of the jaws could have fixed and riveted them more securely, Ralph stood, for some minutes, in the attitude in which he had last addressed his nephew: breathing heavily, but as rigid and motionless in other respects as if he had been a brazen statue. After a time he began, by slow degrees, as a man rousing himself from heavy slumber, to relax. For a moment he shook his clasped fist towards the door by which Nicholas had disappeared; and then thrusting it into his breast, as if to repress by force even this show of passion, turned round and confronted the less hardy usurer, who had not yet risen from the ground.

The cowering wretch, who still shook in every limb, and whose few grey hairs trembled and quivered on his head with abject dismay, tottered to his feet as he met Ralph's eye, and, shielding his face with both hands, protested, while he crept towards the door, that it was no fault of his.

"Who said it was, man?" returned Ralph in a suppressed voice. "Who said it was?"

"You looked as if you thought I was to blame," said Gride timidly.

"Pshaw!" Ralph muttered, forcing a laugh. "I blame him for not living an hour longer—one hour longer would have been long enough—I blame no one else."

"N—n—no one else?" said Gride.

"Not for this mischance," replied Ralph. "I have an old score to clear with that—that young fellow who has carried off your mistress; but that has nothing to do with his blustering just now, for we should soon have been quit of him, but for this cursed accident."

There was something so unnatural in the calmness with which Ralph Nickleby spoke, when coupled with the face, the expression of the features, to which every nerve and muscle, as it twitched and throbbed with a spasm whose workings no effort could conceal, gave, every instant, some new and frightful aspect—there was something so unnatural and ghastly in the contrast between his harsh, slow, steady voice (only altered by a certain halting of the breath which made him pause between almost every word like a drunken man bent upon speaking plainly), and these evidences of the most intense and violent passions, and the struggle he made to keep them under—that if the dead body which lay above had stood, instead of him, before the cowering Gride, it could scarcely have presented a spectacle which would have terrified him more.

"The coach," said Ralph after a time, during which he had struggled like some strong man against a fit. "We came in a coach. Is it—waiting?"

Gride gladly availed himself of the pretext for going to the window to see. Ralph, keeping his face steadily the other way, tore at his shirt with the hand which he had thrust into his breast, and muttered, in a hoarse whisper:

"Ten thousand pounds! He said ten thousand! The precise sum paid in but yesterday for the two mortgages, and which would have gone out again, at heavy interest, to-morrow. If that house has failed, and he the first to bring the news!—Is the coach there?"

"Yes, yes," said Gride, startled by the fierce tone of the inquiry. "It's here. Dear, dear, what a fiery man you are!"

"Come here," said Ralph, beckoning to him. "We mustn't make a show of being disturbed. We'll go down arm-in-arm."

"But you pinch me black and blue," urged Gride.

Ralph let him go impatiently, and, descending the stairs with his usual firm and heavy tread, got into the coach. Arthur Gride followed. After looking doubtfully at Ralph when the man asked where he was to drive, and finding that he remained silent, and expressed no wish upon the subject, Arthur mentioned his own house, and thither they proceeded.

On their way Ralph sat in the furthest corner with folded arms, and uttered not a word. With his chin sunk upon his breast, and his downcast eyes quite hidden by the contraction of his knotted brows, he might have been asleep for any sign of consciousness he gave until the coach stopped, when he raised his head, and, glancing through the window, inquired what place that was.

"My house," answered the disconsolate Gride, affected, perhaps, by its loneliness. "Oh dear! my house."

"True," said Ralph. "I have not observed the way we came. I should like a glass of water. You have that in the house, I suppose?"

"You shall have a glass of—of anything you like," answered Gride with a groan. "It's no use knocking, coachman. Ring the bell!"

The man rang, and rang, and rang again; then, knocked until the street re-echoed with the sounds; then, listened at the keyhole of the door. Nobody came. The house was silent as the grave.

"How is this?" said Ralph impatiently.

"Peg is so very deaf," answered Gride with a look of anxiety and alarm. "Oh dear! Ring again, coachman. She *sees* the bell."

Again the man rang and knocked, and knocked and rang again. Some of the neighbours threw up their windows, and called across the street to each other that old Gride's housekeeper must have dropped down dead. Others collected round the coach, and gave vent to various surmises; some held that she had fallen asleep; some, that she had burnt herself to death; some, that she had got drunk; and one very fat man that she had seen something to eat which had frightened her so much (not being used to it) that she had fallen into a fit. This last suggestion particularly delighted the bystanders, who cheered it rather uproariously, and were, with some difficulty, deterred from dropping down the area and breaking open the kitchen door to ascertain the fact. Nor was this all. Rumours having gone abroad that Arthur was to be married that morning, very particular inquiries were made after the bride, who was held by the majority to be disguised in the person of Mr. Ralph Nickleby, which gave rise to much jocose indignation at the public appearance of a bride in boots and pantaloons, and called forth a great many hoots and groans. At length the two money-lenders obtained shelter in a house next door, and, being accommodated with a ladder, clambered over the wall of the back-yard, which was not a high one, and descended in safety on the other side.

"I am almost afraid to go in, I declare," said Arthur, turning to Ralph when they were alone. "Suppose she should be murdered—lying with her brains knocked out by a poker—eh?"

"Suppose she were," said Ralph. "I tell you, I wish such things were more common than they are, and more easily done. You may stare and shiver—I do!"

He applied himself to a pump in the yard; and, having taken a deep draught of water and flung a quantity on his head and face, regained his accustomed manner, and led the way into the house; Gride following close at his heels.

It was the same dark place as ever: every room dismal and silent as it was wont to be, and every ghostly article of furniture in its customary place. The iron heart of the grim old clock, undisturbed by all the noise without, still beat heavily within its dusty case; the tottering presses slunk from the sight, as usual, in their melancholy corners; the echoes of footsteps returned the same dreary sound; the long-legged spider paused in his nimble run, and, scared by the sight of two men in that his dull domain, hung motionless on the wall, counterfeiting death until they should have passed him by.

From cellar to garret went the two usurers, opening every creaking door, and looking into every deserted room. But no Peg was there. At last they sat them down in the apartment which Arthur Gride usually inhabited, to rest after their search.

"The hag is out, on some preparation for your wedding festivities, I suppose," said Ralph, preparing to depart. "See here! I destroy the bond; we shall never need it now."

Gride, who had been peering narrowly about the room, fell, at that moment, upon his knees before a large chest, and uttered a terrible yell.

"How now?" said Ralph, looking sternly round.

"Robbed! robbed!" screamed Arthur Gride.

"Robbed! of money?"

"No, no, no! Worse! far worse!"

"Of what, then?" demanded Ralph.

"Worse than money, worse than money!" cried the old man, casting the papers out of the chest, like some beast tearing up the earth. "She had better have stolen money—all my money—I haven't much! She had better have made me a beggar than have done this!"

"Done what?" said Ralph. "Done what, you devil's dotard?"

Still Gride made no answer, but tore and scratched among the papers, and yelled and screeched like a fiend in torment.

"There is something missing, you say," said Ralph, shaking him furiously by the collar. "What is it?"

"Papers, deeds. I am a ruined man—lost—lost! I am robbed, I am ruined! She saw me reading it—reading it of late—I did very often—she watched me—saw me put it in the box that fitted into this—the box is gone—she has stolen it.—Damnation seize her, she has robbed me!"

"Of *what?*" cried Ralph, on whom a sudden

"THERE IS SOMETHING MISSING, YOU SAY," SAID RALPH, SHAKING HIM FURIOUSLY BY THE COLLAR. "WHAT IS IT?"

light appeared to break, for his eyes flashed and his frame trembled with agitation as he clutched Gride by his bony arm. "Of what?"

"She don't know what it is; she can't read!" shrieked Gride, not heeding the inquiry. "There's only one way in which money can be made of it, and that is by taking it to *her*. Somebody will read it for her, and tell her what to do. She and her accomplice will get money for it, and be let off besides; they'll make a merit of it—say they found it—knew it—and be evidence against me. The only person it will fall upon is me—me—me!"

"Patience!" said Ralph, clutching him still tighter, and eyeing him with a sidelong look, so fixed and eager as sufficiently to denote that he had some hidden purpose in what he was about to say. "Hear reason. She can't have been gone long. I'll call the police. Do you but give information of what she has stolen, and

they'll lay hands upon her, trust me.—Here—help!"

"No—no—no!" screamed the old man, putting his hand on Ralph's mouth. "I can't, I daren't."

"Help! help!" cried Ralph.

"No, no, no!" shrieked the other, stamping on the ground with the energy of a madman. "I tell you no. I daren't—I daren't!"

"Daren't make this robbery public?" said Ralph.

"No!" rejoined Gride, wringing his hands. "Hush! Hush! Not a word of this: not a word must be said. I am undone. Whichever way I turn, I am undone. I am betrayed. I shall be given up. I shall die in Newgate!"

With frantic exclamations such as these, and with many others in which fear, grief, and rage were strangely blended, the panic-stricken wretch gradually subdued his first loud outcry, until it had softened down into a low despairing moan, chequered now and then by a howl, as, going over such papers as were left in the chest, he discovered some new loss. With very little excuse for departing so abruptly, Ralph left him, and, greatly disappointing the loiterers outside the house by telling them there was nothing the matter, got into the coach, and was driven to his own home.

A letter lay on his table. He let it lie there for some time, as if he had not the courage to open it, but at length did so, and turned deadly pale.

"The worst has happened," he said; "the house has failed. I see—the rumour was abroad in the City last night, and reached the ears of those merchants. Well—well!"

He strode violently up and down the room, and stopped again.

"Ten thousand pounds! And only lying there for a day—for one day! How many anxious years, how many pinching days and sleepless nights, before I scraped together that ten thousand pounds!—Ten thousand pounds! How many proud painted dames would have fawned and smiled, and how many spendthrift blockheads done me lip-service to my face and cursed me in their hearts, while I turned that ten thousand pounds into twenty! While I ground, and pinched, and used these needy borrowers for my pleasure and profit, what smooth-tongued speeches, and courteous looks, and civil letters they would have given me! The cant of the lying world is, that men like me compass our riches by dissimulation and treachery: by fawning, cringing, and stooping. Why, how many lies, what mean and abject evasions, what humbled behaviour from upstarts who, but for my money, would spurn me aside as they do their betters every day, would that ten thousand pounds have brought me in!—Grant that I had doubled it—made cent. per cent.—for every sovereign told another—there would not be one piece of money in all the heap which wouldn't represent ten thousand mean and paltry lies, told—not by the money-lender, oh no! but by the money-borrowers—your liberal, thoughtless, generous, dashing folks, who wouldn't be so mean as save a sixpence for the world!"

Striving, as it would seem, to lose part of the bitterness of his regrets in the bitterness of these other thoughts, Ralph continued to pace the room. There was less and less of resolution in his manner as his mind gradually reverted to his loss. At length, dropping into his elbow-chair, and grasping its sides so firmly that they creaked again, he said:

"The time has been when nothing could have moved me like the loss of this great sum—nothing—for births, deaths, marriages, and all the events which are of interest to most men, have (unless they are connected with gain or loss of money) no interest for me. But now, I swear, I mix up with the loss his triumph in telling it. If he had brought it about,—I almost feel as if he had,—I couldn't hate him more. Let me but retaliate upon him by degrees, however slow—let me but begin to get the better of him, let me but turn the scale—and I can bear it."

His meditations were long and deep. They terminated in his dispatching a letter by Newman, addressed to Mr. Squeers at the Saracen's Head, with instructions to inquire whether he had arrived in town, and if so, to wait an answer. Newman brought back the information that Mr. Squeers had come by mail that morning, and had received the letter in bed; but that he sent his duty, and word that he would get up and wait upon Mr. Nickleby directly.

The interval between the delivery of this message and the arrival of Mr. Squeers was very short; but, before he came, Ralph had suppressed every sign of emotion, and once more regained the hard, immovable, inflexible manner which was habitual to him, and to which, perhaps, was ascribable no small part of the influence which, over many men of no very strong prejudices on the score of morality, he could exert, almost at will.

"Well, Mr. Squeers," he said, welcoming that worthy with his accustomed smile, of which a sharp look and a thoughtful frown were part and parcel, "how do *you* do?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Squeers, "I'm pretty

well. So's the family, and so's the boys, except for a sort of rash as is a running through the school, and rather puts 'em off their feed. But it's a ill wind as blows no good to nobody; that's what I always say when them lads has a wisitation. A wisitation, sir, is the lot of mortality. Mortality itself, sir, is a wisitation. The world is chock-full of wisitations; and if a boy repines at a wisitation, and makes you uncomfortable with his noise, he must have his head punched. That's going according to the Scripter, that is."

"Mr. Squeers," said Ralph drily.

"Sir."

"We'll avoid these precious morsels of morality if you please, and talk of business."

"With all my heart, sir," rejoined Squeers, "and first let me say——"

"First let *me* say, if you please—— Noggs!"

Newman presented himself when the summons had been twice or thrice repeated, and asked if his master called.

"I did. Go to your dinner. And go at once. Do you hear?"

"It an't time," said Newman doggedly.

"My time is yours, and I say it is," returned Ralph.

"You alter it every day," said Newman. "It isn't fair."

"You don't keep many cooks, and can easily apologise to them for the trouble," retorted Ralph. "Begone, sir!"

Ralph not only issued this order in his most peremptory manner, but, under pretence of fetching some papers from the little office, saw it obeyed, and, when Newman had left the house, chained the door, to prevent the possibility of his returning secretly by means of his latch-key.

"I have reason to suspect that fellow," said Ralph when he returned to his own office. "Therefore, until I have thought of the shortest and least troublesome way of ruining him, I hold it best to keep him at a distance."

"It wouldn't take much to ruin him, I should think," said Squeers with a grin.

"Perhaps not," answered Ralph. "Nor to ruin a great many people whom I know. You were going to say——?"

Ralph's summary and matter-of-course way of holding up this example, and throwing out the hint that followed it, had evidently an effect (as doubtless it was designed to have) upon Mr. Squeers, who said, after a little hesitation and in a much more subdued tone:

"Why, what I was a-going to say, sir, is, that this here business regarding of that ungrateful and hard-hearted chap, Snawley senior, puts me out of my way, and occasions a inconveniency quite unparalleled, besides, as I may say, making, for whole weeks together, Mrs. Squeers a perfect widder. It's a pleasure to me to act with you, of course."

"Of course," said Ralph drily.

"Yes, I say of course," resumed Mr. Squeers, rubbing his knees, "but at the same time, when one comes, as I do now, better than two hundred and fifty mile to take a afferdavid, it does put a man out a good deal, letting alone the risk."

"And where may the risk be, Mr. Squeers?" said Ralph.

"I said, letting alone the risk," replied Squeers evasively.

"And I said, where was the risk?"

"I wasn't complaining, you know, Mr. Nickleby," pleaded Squeers. "Upon my word I never see such a——"

"I ask you where is the risk?" repeated Ralph emphatically.

"Where the risk?" returned Squeers, rubbing his knees still harder. "Why, it an't necessary to mention—certain subjects is best awoided. Oh, you know what risk I mean!"

"How often have I told you," said Ralph, "and how often am I to tell you, that you run no risk? What have you sworn, or what are you asked to swear, but that, at such and such a time, a boy was left with you in the name of Smike; that he was at your school for a given number of years, was lost under such and such circumstances, is now found, and has been identified by you in such and such keeping? This is all true—is it not?"

"Yes," replied Squeers, "that's all true."

"Well, then," said Ralph, "what risk do you run? Who swears to a lie but Snawley—a man whom I have paid much less than I have you?"

"He certainly did it cheap, did Snawley," observed Squeers.

"He did it cheap!" retorted Ralph testily. "Yes, and he did it well, and carries it off with a hypocritical face and a sanctified air, but you—— Risk! What do you mean by risk? The certificates are all genuine, Snawley *had* another son, he *has* been married twice, his first wife *is* dead, none but her ghost could tell that she didn't write that letter, none but Snawley himself can tell that this is not his son, and that his son is food for worms! The only perjury is Snawley's, and I fancy he is pretty well used to it. Where's your risk?"

"Why, you know," said Squeers, fidgeting in his chair, "if you come to that, I might say where's yours?"

"You might say where's mine!" returned Ralph. "You may say where's mine. I don't appear in the business—neither do you. All Snawley's interest is to stick well to the story he has told; and all his risk is, to depart from it in the least. Talk of *your* risk in the conspiracy!"

"I say," remonstrated Squeers, looking uneasily round: "don't call it that—just as a favour, don't."

"Call it what you like," said Ralph irritably, "but attend to me. This tale was originally fabricated as a means of annoyance against one who hurt your trade and half cudgelled you to death, and to enable you to obtain repossession of a half-dead drudge, whom you wished to regain, because, while you wreaked your vengeance on him for his share in the business, you knew that the knowledge that he was again in your power would be the best punishment you could inflict upon your enemy. Is that so, Mr. Squeers?"

"Why, sir," returned Squeers, almost overpowered by the determination which Ralph displayed to make everything tell against him, and by his stern unyielding manner, "in a measure it was."

"What does that mean?" said Ralph.

"Why, in a measure means," returned Squeers, "as it may be, that it wasn't all on my account, because you had some old grudge to satisfy, too."

"If I had not had," said Ralph, in no way abashed by the reminder, "do you think I should have helped you?"

"Why, no, I don't suppose you would," Squeers replied. "I only wanted that point to be all square and straight between us."

"How can it ever be otherwise?" retorted Ralph. "Except that the account is against me, for I spend money to gratify my hatred, and you pocket it, and gratify yours at the same time. You are, at least, as avaricious as you are revengeful. So am I. Which is best off? You, who win money and revenge at the same time, and by the same process, and who are, at all events, sure of money, if not of revenge; or I, who am only sure of spending money in any case, and can but win bare revenge at last?"

As Mr. Squeers could only answer this proposition by shrugs and smiles, Ralph bade him be silent, and thankful that he was so well off; and then, fixing his eyes steadily upon him, proceeded to say:

First, that Nicholas had thwarted him in a plan he had formed for the disposal in marriage of a certain young lady, and had, in the confusion attendant on her father's sudden death, secured that lady himself, and borne her off in triumph.

Secondly, that by some will or settlement—certainly by some instrument in writing, which must contain the young lady's name, and could be, therefore, easily selected from others, if access to the place where it was deposited were once secured—she was entitled to property which, if the existence of this deed ever became known to her, would make her husband (and Ralph represented that Nicholas was certain to marry her) a rich and prosperous man, and most formidable enemy.

Thirdly, that this deed had been, with others, stolen from one who had himself obtained or concealed it fraudulently, and who feared to take any steps for its recovery; and that he (Ralph) knew the thief.

To all this Mr. Squeers listened with greedy ears that devoured every syllable, and with his one eye and his mouth wide open: marvelling for what special reason he was honoured with so much of Ralph's confidence, and to what it all tended.

"Now," said Ralph, leaning forward, and placing his hand on Squeers's arm, "hear the design which I have conceived, and which I must—I say, must, if I can ripen it—have carried into execution. No advantage can be reaped from this deed, whatever it is, save by the girl herself, or her husband; and the possession of this deed by one or other of them is indispensable to any advantage being gained. *That* I have discovered beyond the possibility of doubt. I want that deed brought here, that I may give the man who brings it fifty pounds in gold, and burn it to ashes before his face."

Mr. Squeers, after following with his eye the action of Ralph's hand towards the fire-place as if he were at that moment consuming the paper, drew a long breath, and said:

"Yes; but who's to bring it?"

"Nobody, perhaps, for much is to be done before it can be got at," said Ralph. "But, if anybody—you!"

Mr. Squeers's first tokens of consternation, and his flat relinquishment of the task, would have staggered most men, if they had not immediately occasioned an utter abandonment of the proposition. On Ralph they produced not the slightest effect. Resuming, when the schoolmaster had quite talked himself out of breath, as coolly as if he had never been interrupted, Ralph proceeded to expatiate on such features of the case as he deemed it most advisable to lay the greatest stress on.

These were, the age, decrepitude, and weakness of Mrs. Sliderskew; the great improbability of her having any accomplice, or even acquaintance: taking into account her secluded habits, and her long residence in such a house as Gride's; the strong reason there was to suppose that the robbery was not the result of a concerted plan: otherwise she would have watched an opportunity of carrying off a sum of money; the difficulty she would be placed in when she began to think on what she had done, and found herself encumbered with documents of whose nature she was utterly ignorant; and the comparative ease with which somebody, with a full knowledge of her position, obtaining access to her, and working on her fears, if necessary, might worm himself into her confidence, and obtain, under one pretence or another, free possession of the deed. To these were added such considerations as the constant residence of Mr. Squeers at a long distance from London, which rendered his association with Mrs. Sliderskew a mere masquerading frolic, in which nobody was likely to recognise him, either at the time or afterwards; the impossibility of Ralph's undertaking the task himself, he being already known to her by sight; and various comments on the uncommon tact and experience of Mr. Squeers: which would make his overreaching one old woman a mere matter of child's play and amusement. In addition to these influences and persuasions, Ralph drew, with his utmost skill and power, a vivid picture of the defeat which Nicholas would sustain, should they succeed, in linking himself to a beggar, where he expected to wed an heiress—glanced at the immeasurable importance it must be, to a man situated as Squeers, to preserve such a friend as himself—dwelt on a long train of benefits, conferred since their first acquaintance, when he had reported favourably of his treatment of a sickly boy who had died under his hands (and whose death was very convenient to Ralph and his clients, but this he did *not* say)—and finally hinted that the fifty pounds might be increased to seventy-five, or, in the event of very great success, even to a hundred.

These arguments at length concluded, Mr. Squeers crossed his legs, uncrossed them, scratched his head, rubbed his eye, examined the palms of his hands, and bit his nails, and, after exhibiting many other signs of restlessness and indecision, asked "whether one hundred pound was the highest that Mr. Nickleby could go." Being answered in the affirmative, he became restless again, and, after some thought, and an unsuccessful inquiry "whether he couldn't go another fifty," said he supposed he must try and do the most he could for a friend: which was always his maxim, and therefore he undertook the job.

"But how are you to get at the woman?" he said. "That's what it is as puzzles me."

"I may not get at her at all," replied Ralph, "but I'll try. I have hunted people in this city, before now, who have been better hid than she; and I know quarters in which a guinea or two, carefully spent, will often solve darker riddles than this—ay, and keep them close too, if need be! I hear my man ringing at the door. We may as well part. You had better not come to and fro, but wait till you hear from me."

"Good!" returned Squeers. "I say! If you shouldn't find her out, you'll pay expenses at the Saracen, and something for loss of time?"

"Well," said Ralph testily; "yes! You have nothing more to say?"

Squeers shaking his head, Ralph accompanied him to the street-door, and audibly wondering, for the edification of Newman, why it was fastened as if it were night, let him in and Squeers out, and returned to his own room.

"Now!" he muttered, "come what come may, for the present I am firm and unshaken. Let me but retrieve this one small portion of my loss and disgrace; let me but defeat him in this one hope, dear to his heart as I know it must be; let me but do this; and it shall be the first link in such a chain, which I will wind about him, as never man forged yet."

CHAPTER LVII.

HOW RALPH NICKLEBY'S AUXILIARY WENT ABOUT HIS WORK, AND HOW HE PROSPERED WITH IT.

IT was a dark, wet, gloomy night in autumn, when in an upper room of a mean house situated in an obscure street, or rather court, near Lambeth, there sat, all alone, a one-eyed man grotesquely habited, either for lack of better garments or for purposes of disguise, in a loose great-coat, with arms half as long again as his own, and a capacity of breadth and length which would have admitted of his winding himself in it, head and all, with the utmost ease, and without any risk of straining the old and greasy material of which it was composed.

So attired, and in a place so far removed from his usual haunts and occupations, and so very poor and wretched in its character, perhaps Mrs. Squeers herself would have had some difficulty in recognising her lord: quickened though her natural sagacity doubtless would have been by the affectionate yearnings and impulses of a tender wife. But Mrs. Squeers's lord it was; and in a tolerably disconsolate mood Mrs. Squeers's lord appeared to be, as, helping himself from a black bottle which stood on the table beside him, he cast round the chamber a look, in which very slight regard for the objects within view was plainly mingled with some regretful and impatient recollection of distant scenes and persons.

There were, certainly, no particular attractions, either in the room over which the glance of Mr. Squeers so discontentedly wandered, or in the narrow street into which it might have penetrated, if he had thought fit to approach the window. The attic chamber in which he sat was bare and mean; the bedstead, and such few other articles of necessary furniture as it contained, were of the commonest description, in a most crazy state, and of a most uninviting appearance. The street was muddy, dirty, and deserted. Having but one outlet, it was traversed by few but the inhabitants at any time; and the night being one of those on which most people are glad to be within doors, it now presented no other signs of life than the dull glimmering of poor candles from the dirty windows, and few sounds but the pattering of the rain, and occasionaliy the heavy closing of some creaking door.

Mr. Squeers continued to look disconsolately about him, and to listen to these noises in profound silence, broken only by the rustling of his large coat, as he now and then moved his arm to raise his glass to his lips—Mr. Squeers continued to do this for some time, until the increasing gloom warned him to snuff the candle. Seeming to be slightly roused by this exertion, he raised his eye to the ceiling, and fixing it upon some uncouth and fantastic figures, traced upon it by the wet and damp which had penetrated through the roof, broke into the following soliloquy:

"Well, this is a pretty go, is this here!—an uncommon pretty go! Here have I been, a matter of how many weeks—hard upon six—a follering up this here blessed old dowager petty larcenerer,"—Mr. Squeers delivered himself of this epithet with great difficulty and effort,—"and Dotheboys Hall a running itself regularly to seed the while! That's the worst of ever being in with a owdacious chap like that old Nickleby. You never know when he's done with you, and, if you're in for a penny, you're in for a pound."

This remark, perhaps, reminded Mr. Squeers that he was in for a hundred pound at any rate. His countenance relaxed, and he raised his glass to his mouth with an air of greater enjoyment of its contents than he had before evinced.

"I never see," soliloquised Mr. Squeers in continuation, "I never see nor come across such a file as that old Nickleby—never! He's out of everybody's depth, he is. He's what you may call a rasper, is Nickleby. To see how sly and cunning he grubbed on, day after day, a worming and plodding and tracing and turning and twining of hisself about, till he found out where this precious Mrs. Peg was hid, and cleared the ground for me to work upon—creeping and crawling and gliding, like a ugly, old, bright-eyed, stagnation-blooded adder! Ah! He'd have made a good 'un in our line, but it would have been too limited for him; his genius would have busted all bonds, and, coming over every obstacle, broke down all before it, till it erected itself into a monneyment of—— Well, I'll think of the rest, and say it when convenient."

Making a halt in his reflections at this place, Mr. Squeers again put his glass to his lips, and, drawing a dirty letter from his pocket, proceeded to con over its contents with the air of a man who had read it very often, and now refreshed his memory rather in the absence of better amusement than for any specific information.

"The pigs is well," said Mr. Squeers, "the cows is well, and the boys is bobbish. Young Sprouter has been a winking, has he? I'll wink him when I get back. 'Cobbey would persist in sniffing while he was a eating his dinner, and said that the beef was so strong it made him.' —Very good, Cobbey, we'll see if we can't make you sniff a little without beef. 'Pitcher was took with another fever,'—of course he was,—'and, being fetched by his friends, died the day after he got home,'—of course he did, and out of aggravation; it's part of a deep-laid system. There an't another chap in the school but that boy as would have died exactly at the end of the quarter: taking it out of me to the very last, and then carrying his spite to the utmost extremity. 'The juniorest Palmer said he wished he was in Heaven,'—I really don't know, I do *not* know what's to be done with that young fellow; he's always a wishing something horrid. He said once he wished he was a donkey, because then he wouldn't have a father as didn't love him! Pretty wicious, that, for a child of six!"

Mr. Squeers was so much moved by the contemplation of this hardened nature in one so young, that he angrily put up the letter, and sought, in a new train of ideas, a subject of consolation.

"It's a long time to have been a lingering in London," he said; "and this is a precious hole to come and live in, even if it has been only for a week or so. Still, one hundred pound is five boys, and five boys takes a whole year to pay one hundred pound, and there's their keep to be substracted, besides. There's nothing lost, neither, by one's being here; because the boys' money comes in just the same as if I was at home, and Mrs. Squeers she keeps them in order. There'll be some lost time to make up, of course—there'll be an arrear of flogging as'll have to be gone through: still, a couple of days makes that all right, and one don't mind a little extra work for one hundred pound. It's pretty nigh the time to wait upon the old woman. From what she said last night, I suspect that, if I'm to succeed at all, I shall succeed to-night; so I'll have half a glass more, to wish myself success, and put myself in spirits. Mrs. Squeers, my dear, your health!"

Leering with his one eye as if the lady to whom he drank had been actually present, Mr. Squeers—in his enthusiasm, no doubt—poured out a full glass, and emptied it; and as the liquor was raw spirits, and he had applied himself to the same bottle more than once already, it is not surprising that he found himself, by this time, in an extremely cheerful state, and quite enough excited for his purpose.

What this purpose was soon appeared; for, after a few turns about the room to steady himself, he took the bottle under his arm, and the glass in his hand, and, blowing out the candle as if he purposed being gone some time, stole out upon the staircase, and creeping softly to a door opposite his own, tapped gently at it.

"But what's the use of tapping?" he said. "She'll never hear. I suppose she isn't doing anything very particular; and, if she is, it don't much matter, that I see."

With this brief preface, Mr. Squeers applied his hand to the latch of the door, and, thrusting his head into a garret far more deplorable than that he had just left, and seeing that there was nobody there but an old woman, who was bending over a wretched fire (for, although the weather was still warm, the evening was chilly), walked in, and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Well, my Slider," said Mr. Squeers jocularly.

"Is that you?" inquired Peg.

"Ah! it's me, and me's the first person singular, nominative case, agreeing with the verb 'it's,' and governed by Squeers understood, as a acorn, a hour; but when the h is sounded, the a only is to be used, as a and, a art, a ighway," replied Mr. Squeers, quoting at random from the grammar. "At least, if it isn't, you don't know any better, and, if it is, I've done it accidentally."

Delivering this reply in his accustomed tone of voice, in which, of course, it was inaudible to Peg, Mr. Squeers drew a stool to the fire, and placing himself over against her, and the bottle and glass on the floor between them, roared out again, very loud:

"Well, my Slider?"

"I hear you," said Peg, receiving him very graciously.

"I've come according to promise," roared Squeers.

"So they used to say in that part of the country I come from," observed Peg complacently, "but I think oil's better."

"Better than what?" roared Squeers, adding some rather strong language in an under-tone.

"No," said Peg, "of course not."

"I never saw such a monster as you are!" muttered Squeers, looking as amiable as he possibly could the while; for Peg's eye was upon him, and she was chuckling fearfully, as though in delight at having made a choice repartee. "Do you see this? This is a bottle."

"I see it," answered Peg.

"Well, and do you see *this?*" bawled Squeers. "This is a glass." Peg saw that too.

"See here, then," said Squeers, accompanying his remarks with appropriate action. "I fill the glass from the bottle, and I say, 'Your health, Slider,' and empty it; then I rinse it genteelly with a little drop, which I'm forced to throw into the fire—hallo! we shall have the chimbley alight next—fill it again, and hand it over to you."

"*Your* health," said Peg.

"She understands that, anyways," muttered Squeers, watching Mrs. Sliderskew as she dispatched her portion, and choked and gasped in a most awful manner after so doing. "Now then, let's have a talk. How's the rheumatics?"

Mrs. Sliderskew, with much blinking and chuckling, and with looks expressive of her strong admiration of Mr. Squeers, his person, manners, and conversation, replied that the rheumatics were better.

"What's the reason," said Mr. Squeers, deriving fresh facetiousness from the bottle; "what's

the reason of rheumatics? What do they mean? What do people have 'em for—eh?"

Mrs. Sliderskew didn't know, but suggested that it was possibly because they couldn't help it.

"Measles, rheumatics, hooping-cough, fevers, agers, and lumbagers," said Mr. Squeers, "is all philosophy together; that's what it is. The heavenly bodies is philosophy, and the earthly bodies is philosophy. If there's a screw loose in a heavenly body, that's philosophy; and if there's a screw loose in a earthly body, that's philosophy too; or it may be that sometimes there's a little metaphysics in it, but that's not often. Philosophy's the chap for me. If a parent asks a question in the classical, commercial, or mathematical line, says I gravely, 'Why, sir, in the first place, are you a philosopher?'—'No, Mr. Squeers,' he says, 'I an't.' 'Then, sir,' says I, 'I am sorry for you, for I shan't be able to explain it.' Naturally the parent goes away and wishes he was a philosopher, and, equally naturally, thinks I'm one."

Saying this, and a great deal more, with tipsy profundity and a serio-comic air, and keeping

"DO YOU SEE THIS? THIS IS A BOTTLE."

his eye all the time on Mrs. Sliderskew, who was unable to hear one word, Mr. Squeers concluded by helping himself and passing the bottle: to which Peg did becoming reverence.

"That's the time of day!" said Mr. Squeers. "You look twenty pound ten better than you did."

Again Mrs. Sliderskew chuckled, but modesty forbade her assenting verbally to the compliment.

"Twenty pound ten better," repeated Mr. Squeers, "than you did that day when I first introduced myself—don't you know?"

"Ah!" said Peg, shaking her head, "but you frightened me that day."

"Did I?" said Squeers. "Well, it was rather a startling thing for a stranger to come and recommend himself by saying that he knew all about you, and what your name was, and why you were living so quiet here, and what you had boned, and who you boned it from, wasn't it?"

Peg nodded her head in strong assent.

"But I know everything that happens in that way, you see," continued Squeers. "Nothing takes place, of that kind, that I an't up to en-

tirely. I'm a sort of a lawyer, Slider, of first-rate standing, and understanding too; I'm the intimate friend and confidential adwiser of pretty nigh every man, woman, and child that gets themselves into difficulties by being too nimble with their fingers; I'm——"

Mr. Squeers's catalogue of his own merits and accomplishments, which was partly the result of a concerted plan between himself and Ralph Nickleby, and flowed, in part, from the black bottle, was here interrupted by Mrs. Sliderskew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she cried, folding her arms and wagging her head; "and so he wasn't married after all, wasn't he—not married after all?"

"No," replied Squeers, "that he wasn't!"

"And a young lover come and carried off the bride, eh?" said Peg.

"From under his very nose," replied Squeers, "and I'm told the young chap cut up rough besides, and broke the winders, and forced him to swaller his wedding favour, which nearly choked him."

"Tell me all about it again," cried Peg with a malicious relish of her old master's defeat, which made her natural hideousness something quite fearful; "let's hear it all again, beginning at the beginning now, as if you'd never told me. Let's have it every word—now—now—beginning at the very first, you know, when he went to the house that morning!"

Mr. Squeers, plying Mrs. Sliderskew freely with the liquor, and sustaining himself under the exertion of speaking so loud by frequent applications to it himself, complied with this request by describing the discomfiture of Arthur Gride, with such improvements on the truth as happened to occur to him, and the ingenious invention and application of which had been very instrumental in recommending him to her notice in the beginning of their acquaintance. Mrs. Sliderskew was in an ecstasy of delight, rolling her head about, drawing up her skinny shoulders, and wrinkling her cadaverous face into so many and such complicated forms of ugliness, as awakened the unbounded astonishment and disgust even of Mr. Squeers.

"He's a treacherous old goat," said Peg, "and cozened me with cunning tricks and lying promises, but never mind. I'm even with him. I'm even with him."

"More than even, Slider," returned Squeers; "you'd have been even with him if he'd got married; but, with the disappointment besides, you're a long way ahead—out of sight, Slider, quite out of sight. And that reminds me," he added, handing her the glass, "if you want me to give you my opinion of them deeds, and tell you what you'd better keep and what you'd better burn, why, now's your time, Slider."

"There an't no hurry for that," said Peg with several knowing looks and winks.

"Oh, very well!" observed Squeers, "it don't matter to me; you asked me, you know. I shouldn't charge you nothing, being a friend. You're the best judge, of course; but you're a bold woman, Slider—that's all."

"How do you mean bold?" said Peg.

"Why, I only mean that, if it was me, I wouldn't keep papers as might hang me littering about when they might be turned into money—them as wasn't useful made away with, and them as was, laid by somewheres safe; that's all," returned Squeers; "but everybody's the best judge of their own affairs. All I say is, Slider, *I* wouldn't do it."

"Come," said Peg, "then you shall see 'em."

"I don't want to see 'em," replied Squeers, affecting to be out of humour; "don't talk as if it was a treat. Show 'em to somebody else, and take their advice."

Mr. Squeers would, very likely, have carried on the farce of being offended a little longer, if Mrs. Sliderskew, in her anxiety to restore herself to her former high position in his good graces, had not become so extremely affectionate, that he stood at some risk of being smothered by her caresses. Repressing, with as good a grace as possible, these little familiarities—for which, there is reason to believe, the black bottle was at least as much to blame as any constitutional infirmity on the part of Mrs. Sliderskew—he protested that he had only been joking: and, in proof of his unimpaired good-humour, that he was ready to examine the deeds at once, if, by so doing, he could afford any satisfaction or relief of mind to his fair friend.

"And now you're up, my Slider," bawled Squeers as she rose to fetch them, "bolt the door."

Peg trotted to the door, and, after fumbling at the bolt, crept to the other end of the room, and from beneath the coals which filled the bottom of the cupboard drew forth a small deal box. Having placed this on the floor at Squeers's feet, she brought, from under the pillow of her bed, a small key, with which she signed to that gentleman to open it. Mr. Squeers, who had eagerly followed her every motion, lost no time in obeying this hint: and, throwing back the lid, gazed with rapture on the documents which lay within.

"Now, you see," said Peg, kneeling down on the floor beside him, and staying his impatient

hand; "what's of no use we'll burn; what we can get any money by we'll keep; and if there's any we could get him into trouble by, and fret and waste away his heart to shreds, those we'll take particular care of; for that's what I want to do, and what I hoped to do when I left him."

"I thought," said Squeers, "that you didn't bear him any particular good-will. But, I say, why didn't you take some money besides?"

"Some what?" asked Peg.

"Some money," roared Squeers. "I do believe the woman hears me, and wants to make me break a wessel, so that she may have the pleasure of nursing me. Some money, Slider—money!"

"Why, what a man you are to ask!" cried Peg with some contempt. "If I had taken money from Arthur Gride, he'd have scoured the whole earth to find me—ay, and he'd have smelt it out, and raked it up, somehow, if I had buried it at the bottom of the deepest well in England. No, no! I knew better than that. I took what I thought his secrets were hid in: and them he couldn't afford to make public, let 'em be worth ever so much money. He's an old dog; a sly, old, cunning, thankless dog! He first starved, and then tricked me; and if I could I'd kill him."

"All right, and very laudable," said Squeers. "But, first and foremost, Slider, burn the box. You should never keep things as may lead to discovery—always mind that. So, while you pull it to pieces (which you can easily do, for it's very old and rickety) and burn it in little bits, I'll look over the papers, and tell you what they are."

Peg, expressing her acquiescence in this arrangement, Mr. Squeers turned the box bottom upwards, and, tumbling the contents upon the floor, handed it to her; the destruction of the box being an extemporary device for engaging her attention, in case it should prove desirable to distract it from his own proceedings.

"There!" said Squeers; "you poke the pieces between the bars, and make up a good fire, and I'll read the while. Let me see—let me see." And taking the candle down beside him, Mr. Squeers, with great eagerness and a cunning grin overspreading his face, entered upon his task of examination.

If the old woman had not been very deaf, she must have heard, when she last went to the door, the breathing of two persons close behind it: and, if those two persons had been unacquainted with her infirmity, they must probably have chosen that moment either for presenting themselves or taking to flight. But, knowing with whom they had to deal, they remained quite still, and now not only appeared unobserved at the door—which was not bolted, for the bolt had no hasp—but warily, and with noiseless footsteps, advanced into the room.

As they stole farther and farther in by slight and scarcely perceptible degrees, and with such caution that they scarcely seemed to breathe, the old hag and Squeers little dreaming of any such invasion, and utterly unconscious of there being any soul near but themselves, were busily occupied with their tasks. The old woman, with her wrinkled face close to the bars of the stove, puffing at the dull embers which had not yet caught the wood—Squeers stooping down to the candle, which brought out the full ugliness of his face, as the light of the fire did that of his companion—both intently engaged, and wearing faces of exultation which contrasted strongly with the anxious looks of those behind, who took advantage of the slightest sound to cover their advance, and, almost before they had moved an inch, and all was silent, stopped again—this, with the large bare room, damp walls, and flickering doubtful light, combined to form a scene which the most careless and indifferent spectator (could any have been present) could scarcely have failed to derive some interest from, and would not readily have forgotten.

Of the stealthy comers Frank Cheeryble was one, and Newman Noggs the other. Newman had caught up, by the rusty nozzle, an old pair of bellows, which were just undergoing a flourish in the air preparatory to a descent upon the head of Mr. Squeers, when Frank, with an earnest gesture, stayed his arm, and, taking another step in advance, came so close behind the schoolmaster that, by leaning slightly forward, he could plainly distinguish the writing which he held up to his eye.

Mr. Squeers, not being remarkably erudite, appeared to be considerably puzzled by this first prize, which was in an engrossing hand, and not very legible except to a practised eye. Having tried it by reading from left to right, and from right to left, and finding it equally clear both ways, he turned it upside down with no better success.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Peg, who, on her knees before the fire, was feeding it with fragments of the box, and grinning in most devilish exultation. "What's that writing about, eh?"

"Nothing particular," replied Squeers, tossing it towards her. "It's only an old lease, as well as I can make out. Throw it in the fire."

Mrs. Sliderskew complied, and inquired what the next one was.

"This," said Squeers, "is a bundle of overdue acceptances and renewed bills of six or eight young gentlemen, but they are all M.P.'s, so it's of no use to anybody. Throw it in the fire!"

Peg did as she was bidden, and waited for the next.

"This," said Squeers, "seems to be some deed of sale of the right of presentation to the rectory of Purechurch, in the valley of Cashup. Take care of that, Slider—literally for God's sake. It'll fetch its price at the Auction Mart."

"What's the next?" inquired Peg.

"Why, this," said Squeers, "seems, from the two letters that's with it, to be a bond from a curate down in the country to pay half a year's wages of forty pound for borrowing twenty. Take care of that, for, if he don't pay it, his bishop will very soon be down upon him. We know what the camel and the needle's eye means—no man as can't live upon his income, whatever it is, must expect to go to heaven at any price. It's very odd; I don't see anything like it yet."

"What's the matter?" said Peg.

"Nothing," replied Squeers, "only I'm looking for——"

Newman raised the bellows again. Once more, Frank, by a rapid motion of his arm, unaccompanied by any noise, checked him in his purpose.

"Here you are," said Squeers, "bonds—take care of them. Warrant of attorney—take care of that. Two cognovits—take care of them. Lease and release—burn that. Ah! 'Madeline Bray—come of age or marry—the said Madeline'—here, burn *that!*"

Eagerly throwing towards the old woman a parchment that he caught up for the purpose, Squeers, as she turned her head, thrust into the breast of his large coat the deed in which these words had caught his eye, and burst into a shout of triumph.

"I've got it!" said Squeers. "I've got it! Hurrah! The plan was a good one, though the chance was desperate, and the day's our own at last!"

Peg demanded what he laughed at, but no answer was returned. Newman's arm could no longer be restrained; the bellows, descending heavily and with unerring aim on the very centre of Mr. Squeers's head, felled him to the floor, and stretched him on it flat and senseless.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IN WHICH ONE SCENE OF THIS HISTORY IS CLOSED.

DIVIDING the distance into two days' journey, in order that his charge might sustain the less exhaustion and fatigue from travelling so far, Nicholas, at the end of the second day from their leaving home, found himself within a very few miles of the spot where the happiest years of his life had been passed, and which, while it filled his mind with pleasant and peaceful thoughts, brought back many painful and vivid recollections of the circumstances in which he and his had wandered forth from their old home, cast upon the rough world and the mercy of strangers.

It needed no such reflections as those which the memory of old days, and wanderings among scenes where our childhood has been passed, usually awaken in the most insensible minds, to soften the heart of Nicholas, and render him more than usually mindful of his drooping friend. By night and day, at all times and seasons: always watchful, attentive, and solicitous, and never varying in the discharge of his self-imposed duty to one so friendless and helpless as he whose sands of life were now fast running out and dwindling rapidly away: he was ever at his side. He never left him. To encourage and animate him, administer to his wants, support and cheer him to the utmost of his power, was now his constant and unceasing occupation.

They procured a humble lodging in a small farm-house, surrounded by meadows where Nicholas had often revelled when a child with a troop of merry schoolfellows; and here they took up their rest.

At first, Smike was strong enough to walk about, for short distances at a time, with no other support or aid than that which Nicholas could afford him. At this time nothing appeared to interest him so much as visiting those places which had been most familiar to his friend in bygone days. Yielding to this fancy, and pleased to find that its indulgence beguiled the sick boy of many tedious hours, and never failed to afford him matter for thought and conversation afterwards, Nicholas made such spots the scenes of their daily rambles: driving him from place to place in a little pony-chair, and supporting him on his arm while they walked slowly among these old haunts, or lingered in the sun-light to take long parting looks of those which were most quiet and beautiful.

It was on such occasions as these that Nicholas, yielding almost unconsciously to the interest of old associations, would point out some tree that he had climbed a hundred times, to peep at the young birds in their nest; and the branch from which he used to shout to little Kate, who stood below terrified at the height he had gained, and yet urging him higher still by the intensity of her admiration. There was the old house, too, which they would pass every day, looking up at the tiny window through which the sun used to stream in and wake him on the summer mornings—they were all summer mornings then—and, climbing up the garden wall and looking over, Nicholas could see the very rose-bush which had come, a present to Kate, from some little lover, and she had planted with her own hands. There were the hedgerows where the brother and sister had so often gathered wild flowers together, and the green fields and shady paths where they had so often strayed. There was not a lane, or brook, or copse, or cottage near, with which some childish event was not entwined, and back it came upon the mind—as events of childhood do—nothing in itself: perhaps a word, a laugh, a look, some slight distress, a passing thought or fear: and yet more strongly and distinctly marked, and better remembered, than the hardest trials or severest sorrows of a year ago.

One of these expeditions led them through the churchyard where was his father's grave. "Even here," said Nicholas softly, "we used to loiter before we knew what death was, and when we little thought whose ashes would rest beneath; and, wondering at the silence, sit down to rest and speak below our breath. Once Kate was lost, and, after an hour of fruitless search, they found her, fast asleep, under that tree which shades my father's grave. He was very fond of her, and said, when he took her up in his arms, still sleeping, that whenever he died he would wish to be buried where his dear little child had laid her head. You see his wish was not forgotten."

Nothing more passed at the time, but that night, as Nicholas sat beside his bed, Smike started from what had seemed to be a slumber, and, laying his hand in his, prayed, as the tears coursed down his face, that he would make him one solemn promise.

"What is that?" said Nicholas kindly. "If I can redeem it, or hope to do so, you know I will."

"I am sure you will," was the reply. "Promise me that, when I die, I shall be buried near—as near as they can make my grave—to the tree we saw to-day."

Nicholas gave the promise; he had few words to give it in, but they were solemn and earnest. His poor friend kept his hand in his, and turned as if to sleep. But there were stifled sobs; and the hand was pressed more than once, or twice, or thrice, before he sank to rest, and slowly loosed his hold.

In a fortnight's time he became too ill to move about. Once or twice Nicholas drove him out, propped up with pillows; but the motion of the chaise was painful to him, and brought on fits of fainting, which, in his weakened state, were dangerous. There was an old couch in the house, which was his favourite resting-place by day; and when the sun shone, and the weather was warm, Nicholas had this wheeled into a little orchard which was close at hand, and, his charge being well wrapped up and carried out to it, they used to sit there sometimes for hours together.

It was on one of these occasions that a circumstance took place which Nicholas, at the time, thoroughly believed to be the mere delusion of an imagination affected by disease; but which he had, afterwards, too good reason to know was of real and actual occurrence.

He had brought Smike out in his arms—poor fellow! a child might have carried him then—to see the sunset, and, having arranged his couch, had taken his seat beside it. He had been watching the whole of the night before, and, being greatly fatigued both in mind and body, gradually fell asleep.

He could not have closed his eyes five minutes, when he was awakened by a scream, and, starting up in that kind of terror which affects a person suddenly roused, saw, to his great astonishment, that his charge had struggled into a sitting posture, and with eyes almost starting from their sockets, cold dew standing on his forehead, and in a fit of trembling which quite convulsed his frame, was calling to him for help.

"Good Heaven, what is this?" said Nicholas, bending over him. "Be calm; you have been dreaming."

"No, no, no!" cried Smike, clinging to him. "Hold me tight! Don't let me go! There—there—behind the tree!"

Nicholas followed his eyes, which were directed to some distance behind the chair from which he himself had just risen. But, there was nothing there.

"This is nothing but your fancy," he said as he strove to compose him; "nothing else, indeed."

"I know better. I saw as plain as I see now,"

was the answer. "Oh! say you'll keep me with you—swear you won't leave me for an instant!"

"Do I ever leave you?" returned Nicholas. "Lie down again—there! You see I'm here. Now, tell me—what was it?"

"Do you remember," said Smike in a low voice, and glancing fearfully round, "do you remember my telling you of the man who first took me to the school?"

"Yes, surely."

"I raised my eyes, just now, towards that tree—that one with the thick trunk—and there, with his eyes fixed on me, he stood!"

"Only reflect for one moment," said Nicholas; "granting, for an instant, that it's likely he is alive and wandering about a lonely place like this, so far removed from the public road, do you think that at this distance of time you could possibly know that man again?"

"Anywhere—in any dress," returned Smike; "but, just now, he stood leaning upon his stick and looking at me, exactly as I told you I remembered him. He was dusty with walking, and poorly dressed—I think his clothes were ragged—but, directly I saw him, the wet night, his face when he left me, the parlour I was left in, and the people that were there, all seemed to come back together. When he knew I saw him, he looked frightened; for he started, and shrunk away. I have thought of him by day, and dreamt of him by night. He looked in my sleep, when I was quite a little child, and has looked in my sleep ever since, as he did just now."

Nicholas endeavoured, by every persuasion and argument he could think of, to convince the terrified creature that his imagination had deceived him, and that this close resemblance between the creation of his dreams and the man he supposed he had seen was but a proof of it; but all in vain. When he could persuade him to remain, for a few moments, in the care of the people to whom the house belonged, he instituted a strict inquiry whether any stranger had been seen, and searched himself behind the tree, and through the orchard, and upon the land immediately adjoining, and in every place near, where it was possible for a man to lie concealed; but all in vain. Satisfied that he was right in his original conjecture, he applied himself to calming the fears of Smike, which, after some time, he partially succeeded in doing, though not in removing the impression upon his mind; for he still declared, again and again, in the most solemn and fervid manner, that he had positively seen what he had described, and that nothing could ever remove his conviction of its reality.

And now Nicholas began to see that hope was gone, and that, upon the partner of his poverty and the sharer of his better fortune, the world was closing fast. There was little pain, little uneasiness, but there was no rallying, no effort, no struggle for life. He was worn and wasted to the last degree; his voice had sunk so low, that he could scarce be heard to speak. Nature was thoroughly exhausted, and he had lain him down to die.

On a fine, mild autumn day, when all was tranquil and at peace: when the soft sweet air crept in at the open window of the quiet room, and not a sound was heard but the gentle rustling of the leaves: Nicholas sat in his old place by the bedside, and knew that the time was nearly come. So very still it was, that, every now and then, he bent down his ear to listen for the breathing of him who lay asleep, as if to assure himself that life was still there, and that he had not fallen into that deep slumber from which on earth there is no waking.

While he was thus employed the closed eyes opened, and on the pale face there came a placid smile.

"That's well!" said Nicholas. "The sleep has done you good."

"I have had such pleasant dreams," was the answer. "Such pleasant, happy dreams!"

"Of what?" said Nicholas.

The dying boy turned towards him, and, putting his arm about his neck, made answer, "I shall soon be there!"

After a short silence he spoke again.

"I am not afraid to die," he said. "I am quite contented. I almost think that, if I could rise from this bed quite well, I would not wish to do so now. You have so often told me we shall meet again—so very often lately, and now I feel the truth of that so strongly—that I can even bear to part from you."

The trembling voice and tearful eye, and the closer grasp of the arm which accompanied these latter words, showed how they filled the speaker's heart; nor were there wanting indications of how deeply they had touched the heart of him to whom they were addressed.

"You say well," returned Nicholas at length, "and comfort me very much, dear fellow. Let me hear you say you are happy, if you can."

"I must tell you something first. I should not have a secret from you. You would not blame me, at a time like this, I know."

"*I* blame you!" exclaimed Nicholas.

"I am sure you would not. You asked me why I was so changed, and—and sat so much alone. Shall I tell you why?"

"Not if it pains you," said Nicholas. "I only asked that I might make you happier, if I could."

"I know—I felt that at the time." He drew his friend closer to him. "You will forgive me; I could not help it, but, though I would have died to make her happy, it broke my heart to see—I know he loves her dearly—oh! who could find that out so soon as I?"

The words which followed were feebly and faintly uttered, and broken by long pauses; but from them Nicholas learnt, for the first time, that the dying boy, with all the ardour of a nature concentrated on one absorbing, hopeless, secret passion, loved his sister Kate.

He had procured a lock of her hair, which hung at his breast, folded in one or two slight ribbons she had worn. He prayed that, when he was dead, Nicholas would take it off, so that no eyes but his might see it, and that, when he was laid in his coffin and about to be placed in the earth, he would hang it round his neck again, that it might rest with him in the grave.

Upon his knees Nicholas gave him this pledge, and promised again that he should rest in the spot he had pointed out. They embraced, and kissed each other on the cheek.

"Now," he murmured, "I am happy."

He fell into a light slumber, and waking smiled as before; then, spoke of beautiful gardens, which he said stretched out before him, and were filled with figures of men, women, and many children, all with light upon their faces; then, whispered that it was Eden—and so died.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PLOTS BEGIN TO FAIL, AND DOUBTS AND DANGERS TO DISTURB THE PLOTTER.

RALPH sat alone, in the solitary room where he was accustomed to take his meals, and to sit of nights when no profitable occupation called him abroad. Before him was an untasted breakfast, and near to where his fingers beat restlessly upon the table, lay his watch. It was long past the time at which, for many years, he had put it in his pocket, and gone with measured steps downstairs to the business of the day, but he took as little heed of its monotonous warning as of the meat and drink before him, and remained with his head resting on one hand, and his eyes fixed moodily on the ground.

This departure from his regular and constant habit, in one so regular and unvarying in all that appertained to the daily pursuit of riches, would almost of itself have told that the usurer was not well. That he laboured under some mental or bodily indisposition, and that it was one of no slight kind so to affect a man like him, was sufficiently shown by his haggard face, jaded air, and hollow languid eyes: which he raised at last with a start and a hasty glance around him, as one who suddenly awakes from sleep, and cannot immediately recognise the place in which he finds himself.

"What is this," he said, "that hangs over me, and I cannot shake off? I have never pampered myself, and should not be ill. I have never moped, and pined, and yielded to fancies; but what *can* a man do without rest?"

He pressed his hand upon his forehead.

"Night after night comes and goes, and I have no rest. If I sleep, what rest is that which is disturbed by constant dreams of the same detested faces crowding round me—of the same detested people, in every variety of action, mingling with all I say and do, and always to my defeat? Waking, what rest have I, constantly haunted by this heavy shadow of—I know not what—which is its worst character? I must have rest. One night's unbroken rest, and I should be a man again."

Pushing the table from him while he spoke, as though he loathed the sight of food, he encountered the watch: the hands of which were almost upon noon.

"This is strange!" he said; "noon, and Noggs not here! What drunken brawl keeps him away? I would give something now—something in money even after that dreadful loss—if he had stabbed a man in a tavern scuffle, or broken into a house, or picked a pocket, or done anything that would send him abroad with an iron ring upon his leg, and rid me of him. Better still, if I could throw temptation in his way, and lure him on to rob me. He should be welcome to what he took, so I brought the law upon him; for he is a traitor, I swear! How, or when, or where, I don't know, though I suspect."

After waiting for another half-hour, he dispatched the woman who kept his house to Newman's lodging, to inquire if he were ill, and why he had not come or sent. She brought back answer that he had not been home all night, and that no one could tell her anything about him.

"But there is a gentleman, sir," she said, "below, who was standing at the door when I came in, and he says——"

"What says he?" demanded Ralph, turning

angrily upon her. "I told you I would see nobody."

"He says," replied the woman, abashed by his harshness, "that he comes on very particular business which admits of no excuse; and I thought perhaps it might be about——"

"About what, in the devil's name?" said Ralph. "*You* spy and speculate on people's business with me, do you?"

"Dear, no, sir! I saw you were anxious, and thought it might be about Mr. Noggs; that's all."

"Saw I was anxious!" muttered Ralph; "they all watch me now. Where is this person? You did not say I was not down yet, I hope?"

The woman replied that he was in the little office, and that she had said her master was engaged, but she would take the message.

"Well," said Ralph, "I'll see him. Go you to your kitchen, and keep there. Do you mind me?"

Glad to be released, the woman quickly disappeared. Collecting himself, and assuming as much of his accustomed manner as his utmost resolution could summon, Ralph descended the stairs. After pausing for a few moments, with his hand upon the lock, he entered Newman's room, and confronted Mr. Charles Cheeryble.

Of all men alive, this was one of the last he would have wished to meet at any time; but, now that he recognised in him only the patron and protector of Nicholas, he would rather have seen a spectre. One beneficial effect, however, the encounter had upon him. It instantly roused all his dormant energies; rekindled in his breast the passions that, for many years, had found an improving home there; called up all his wrath, hatred, and malice; restored the sneer to his lip, and the scowl to his brow; and made him again, in all outward appearance, the same Ralph Nickleby whom so many had bitter cause to remember.

"Humph!" said Ralph, pausing at the door. "This is an unexpected favour, sir."

"And an unwelcome one," said brother Charles; "an unwelcome one, I know."

"Men say you are truth itself, sir," replied Ralph. "You speak truth now, at all events, and I'll not contradict you. The favour is, at least, as unwelcome as it is unexpected. I can scarcely say more."

"Plainly, sir——" began brother Charles.

"Plainly, sir," interrupted Ralph, "I wish this conference to be a short one, and to end where it begins. I guess the subject upon which you are about to speak, and I'll not hear you. You like plainness, I believe,—there it is. Here is the door, as you see. Our way lies in very different directions. Take yours, I beg of you, and leave me to pursue mine in quiet."

"In quiet!" repeated brother Charles mildly, and looking at him with more of pity than reproach. "To pursue *his* way in quiet!"

"You will scarcely remain in my house, I presume, sir, against my will," said Ralph; "or you can scarcely hope to make an impression upon a man who closes his ears to all that you can say, and is firmly and resolutely determined not to hear you."

"Mr. Nickleby, sir," returned brother Charles: no less mildly than before, but firmly too: "I come here against my will—sorely and grievously against my will. I have never been in this house before; and, to speak my mind, sir, I don't feel at home or easy in it, and have no wish ever to be here again. You do not guess the subject on which I come to speak to you; you do not indeed. I am sure of that, or your manner would be a very different one."

Ralph glanced keenly at him, but the clear eye and open countenance of the honest old merchant underwent no change of expression, and met his look without reserve.

"Shall I go on?" said Mr. Cheeryble.

"Oh! by all means, if you please," returned Ralph drily. "Here are walls to speak to, sir, a desk, and two stools—most attentive auditors, and certain not to interrupt you. Go on, I beg; make my house yours, and perhaps, by the time I return from my walk, you will have finished what you have to say, and will yield me up possession again."

So saying, he buttoned his coat, and, turning into the passage, took down his hat. The old gentleman followed, and was about to speak, when Ralph waved him off impatiently, and said:

"Not a word. I tell you, sir, not a wōrd. Virtuous as you are, you are not an angel yet, to appear in men's houses whether they will or no, and pour your speech into unwilling ears. Preach to the walls, I tell you—not to me!"

"I am no angel, Heaven knows," returned brother Charles, shaking his head, "but an erring and imperfect man; nevertheless, there is one quality which all men have, in common with the angels, blessed opportunities of exercising, if they will—mercy. It is an errand of mercy that brings me here. Pray let me discharge it."

"I show no mercy," retorted Ralph with a triumphant smile, "and I ask none. Seek no mercy from me, sir, in behalf of the fellow who has imposed upon your childish credulity, but let him expect the worst that I can do."

"*He* ask mercy at your hands!" exclaimed the old merchant warmly. "Ask it at his, sir; ask it at his. If you will not hear me now, when you may, hear me when you must, or anticipate what I would say, and take measures to prevent our ever meeting again. Your nephew is a noble lad, sir, an honest, noble lad. What you are, Mr. Nickleby, I will not say; but what you have done I know. Now, sir, when you go about the business in which you have been recently engaged, and find it difficult of pursuing, come to me and my brother Ned, and Tim Linkinwater, sir, and we'll explain it for you—and come soon, or it may be too late, and you may have it explained with a little more roughness, and a little less delicacy—and never forget, sir, that I came here this morning in mercy to you, and am still ready to talk to you in the same spirit."

With these words, uttered with great emphasis and emotion, brother Charles put on his broad-brimmed hat, and, passing Ralph Nickleby without any other remark, trotted nimbly into the street. Ralph looked after him, but neither moved nor spoke for some time: when he broke what almost seemed the silence of stupefaction by a scornful laugh.

"This," he said, "from its wildness, should be another of those dreams that have so broken my rest of late. In mercy to me!—Pho! The old simpleton has gone mad."

Although he expressed himself in this derisive and contemptuous manner, it was plain that, the more Ralph pondered, the more ill at ease he became, and the more he laboured under some vague anxiety and alarm, which increased as the time passed on, and no tidings of Newman Noggs arrived. After waiting until late in the afternoon, tortured by various apprehensions and misgivings, and the recollection of the warning which his nephew had given him when they last met: the further confirmation of which now presented itself in one shape of probability, now in another, and haunted him perpetually: he left home, and, scarcely knowing why, save that he was in a suspicious and agitated mood, betook himself to Snawley's house. His wife presented herself; and of her Ralph inquired whether her husband was at home.

"No," she said sharply, "he is not, indeed, and I don't think he will be at home for a very long time; that's more."

"Do you know who I am?" asked Ralph.

"Oh yes! I know you very well—too well, perhaps, and perhaps he does too, and sorry am I that I should have to say it."

"Tell him that I saw him through the window blind above, as I crossed the road just now, and that I would speak to him on business," said Ralph. "Do you hear?"

"I hear," rejoined Mrs. Snawley, taking no further notice of the request.

"I knew this woman was a hypocrite, in the way of psalms and Scripture phrases," said Ralph, passing quietly by, "but I never knew she drank before."

"Stop! You don't come in here," said Mr. Snawley's better half, interposing her person, which was a robust one, in the doorway. "You have said more than enough to him on business, before now. I always told him what dealing with you and working out your schemes would come to. It was either you or the schoolmaster—one of you, or the two between you—that got the forged letter done; remember that! That wasn't his doing, so don't lay it at his door."

"Hold your tongue, you Jezebel!" said Ralph, looking fearfully round.

"Ah! I know when to hold my tongue, and when to speak, Mr. Nickleby," retorted the dame. "Take care that other people know when to hold theirs."

"You jade," said Ralph, "if your husband has been idiot enough to trust you with his secrets, keep them—keep them, she-devil that you are!"

"Not so much his secrets as other people's secrets, perhaps," retorted the woman; "not so much his secrets as yours. None of your black looks at me! You'll want 'em all, perhaps, for another time. You had better keep 'em."

"Will you," said Ralph, suppressing his passion as well as he could, and clutching her tightly by the wrist, "will you go to your husband, and tell him that I know he is at home, and that I must see him? And will you tell me what it is that you and he mean by this new style of behaviour?"

"No," replied the woman, violently disengaging herself, "I'll do neither."

"You set me at defiance, do you?" said Ralph.

"Yes," was the answer. "I do."

For an instant Ralph had his hand raised, as though he were about to strike her; but, checking himself, and nodding his head and muttering as though to assure her he would not forget this, walked away.

Thence he went straight to the inn which Mr. Squeers frequented, and inquired when he had been there last; in the vague hope that, successful or unsuccessful, he might, by this time, have returned from his mission, and be

able to assure him that all was safe. But Mr. Squeers had not been there for ten days, and all that the people could tell about him was, that he had left his luggage and his bill.

Disturbed by a thousand fears and surmises, and bent upon ascertaining whether Squeers had any suspicion of Snawley, or was, in any way, a party to this altered behaviour, Ralph determined to hazard the extreme step of inquiring for him at the Lambeth lodging, and having an interview with him even there. Bent upon this purpose, and in that mood in which delay is insupportable, he repaired at once to the place; and being, by description, perfectly acquainted with the situation of his room, crept up-stairs and knocked gently at the door.

Not one, nor two, nor three, nor yet a dozen knocks, served to convince Ralph, against his wish, that there was nobody inside. He reasoned that he might be asleep; and, listening, almost persuaded himself that he could hear him breathe. Even when he was satisfied that he could not be there, he sat patiently on a broken stair, and waited; arguing that he had gone out upon some slight errand, and must soon return.

Many feet came up the creaking stairs; and the step of some seemed to his listening ear so like that of the man for whom he waited, that Ralph often stood up to be ready to address him when he reached the top; but, one by one, each person turned off into some room short of the place where he was stationed: and at every such disappointment he felt quite chilled and lonely.

At length he felt it was hopeless to remain, and, going down-stairs again, inquired of one of the lodgers if he knew anything of Mr. Squeers's movements — mentioning that worthy by an assumed name which had been agreed upon between them. By this lodger he was referred to another, and by him to some one else, from whom he learnt that, late on the previous night, he had gone out hastily with two men, who had shortly afterwards returned for the old woman who lived on the same floor; and that, although the circumstance had attracted the attention of the informant, he had not spoken to them at the time, nor made any inquiry afterwards.

This possessed him with the idea that, perhaps, Peg Sliderskew had been apprehended for the robbery, and that Mr. Squeers, being with her at the time, had been apprehended also, on suspicion of being a confederate. If this were so, the fact must be known to Gride; and to Gride's house he directed his steps; now thoroughly alarmed, and fearful that there were indeed plots afoot, tending to his discomfiture and ruin.

Arrived at the usurer's house, he found the windows close shut, the dingy blinds drawn down; all was silent, melancholy, and deserted. But this was its usual aspect. He knocked—gently at first—then loud and vigorously—but nobody came. He wrote a few words in pencil on a card, and, having thrust it under the door, was going away, when a noise above, as though a window-sash were stealthily raised, caught his ear, and, looking up, he could just discern the face of Gride himself, cautiously peering over the house parapet from the window of the garret. Seeing who was below, he drew it in again; not so quickly, however, but that Ralph let him know he was observed, and called to him to come down.

The call being repeated, Gride looked out again, so cautiously that no part of the old man's body was visible. The sharp features and white hair appearing alone, above the parapet, looked like a severed head garnishing the wall.

"Hush!" he cried. "Go away—go away!"

"Come down!" said Ralph, beckoning him.

"Go a—way!" squeaked Gride, shaking his head in a sort of ecstasy of impatience. "Don't speak to me, don't knock, don't call attention to the house, but go away."

"I'll knock, I swear, till I have your neighbours up in arms," said Ralph, "if you don't tell me what you mean by lurking there, you whining cur!"

"I can't hear what you say—don't talk to me—it isn't safe—go away—go away!" returned Gride.

"Come down, I say! Will you come down?" said Ralph fiercely.

"No—o—o—o!" snarled Gride. He drew in his head; and Ralph, left standing in the street, could hear the sash closed, as gently and carefully as it had been opened.

"How is this," said he, "that they all fall from me, and shun me like the plague—these men who have licked the dust from my feet? *Is* my day past, and is this indeed the coming on of night? I'll know what it means! I will, at any cost. I am firmer and more myself, just now, than I have been these many days."

Turning from the door, which, in the first transport of his rage, he had meditated battering upon until Gride's very fears should impel him to open it, he turned his face towards the City, and, working his way steadily through the crowd which was pouring from it (it was by this time between five and six o'clock in the afternoon), went straight to the house of business of the

brothers Cheeryble, and, putting his head into the glass case, found Tim Linkinwater alone.

"My name's Nickleby," said Ralph.

"I know it," replied Tim, surveying him through his spectacles.

"Which of your firm was it who called on me this morning?" demanded Ralph.

"Mr. Charles."

"Then, tell Mr. Charles I want to see him."

"You shall see," said Tim, getting off his stool with great agility, "you shall see, not only Mr. Charles, but Mr. Ned likewise."

Tim stopped, looked steadily and severely at Ralph, nodded his head once in a curt manner which seemed to say there was a little more behind, and vanished. After a short interval he returned, and, ushering Ralph into the presence of the two brothers, remained in the room himself.

"I want to speak to you, who spoke to me this morning," said Ralph, pointing out with his finger the man whom he addressed.

"I have no secrets from my brother Ned, or from Tim Linkinwater," observed brother Charles quietly.

"I have," said Ralph.

"Mr. Nickleby, sir," said brother Ned, "the matter upon which my brother Charles called upon you this morning is one which is already perfectly well known to us three, and to others besides, and must unhappily soon become known to a great many more. He waited upon you, sir, this morning, alone, as a matter of delicacy and consideration. We feel, now, that further delicacy and consideration would be misplaced; and, if we confer together, it must be as we are, or not at all."

"Well, gentlemen," said Ralph with a curl of the lip, "talking in riddles would seem to be the peculiar forte of you two, and I suppose your clerk, like a prudent man, has studied the art also with a view to your good graces. Talk in company, gentlemen, in God's name. I'll humour you."

"Humour!" cried Tim Linkinwater, suddenly growing very red in the face. "He'll humour us! He'll humour Cheeryble Brothers! Do you hear that? Do you hear him? *Do* you hear him say he'll humour Cheeryble Brothers?"

"Tim," said Charles and Ned together, "pray, Tim—pray now, don't."

Tim, taking the hint, stifled his indignation as well as he could, and suffered it to escape through his spectacles, with the additional safety-valve of a short hysterical laugh now and then, which seemed to relieve him mightily.

"As nobody bids me to a seat," said Ralph, looking round, "I'll take one, for I am fatigued with walking. And now, if you please, gentlemen, I wish to know—I demand to know; I have the right—what you have to say to me, which justifies such a tone as you have assumed, and that underhand interference in my affairs which, I have reason to suppose, you have been practising. I tell you plainly, gentlemen, that little as I care for the opinion of the world (as the slang goes), I don't chose to submit quietly to slander and malice. Whether you suffer yourselves to be imposed upon too easily, or wilfully make yourselves parties to it, the result to me is the same. In either case, you can't expect from a plain man like myself much consideration or forbearance."

So coolly and deliberately was this said, that nine men out of ten, ignorant of the circumstances, would have supposed Ralph to be really an injured man. There he sat with folded arms; paler than usual, certainly, and sufficiently ill favoured, but quite collected—far more so than the brothers or the exasperated Tim—and ready to face out the worst.

"Very well, sir," said brother Charles. "Very well. Brother Ned, will you ring the bell?"

"Charles, my dear fellow! stop one instant," returned the other. "It will be better for Mr. Nickleby and for our object that he should remain silent, if he can, till we have said what we have to say. I wish him to understand that."

"Quite right, quite right," said brother Charles.

Ralph smiled, but made no reply. The bell was rung; the room-door opened; a man came in with a halting walk; and, looking round, Ralph's eyes met those of Newman Noggs. From that moment his heart began to fail him.

"This is a good beginning," he said bitterly. "Oh! this is a good beginning. You are candid, honest, open-hearted, fair-dealing men! I always knew the real worth of such characters as yours! To tamper with a fellow like this, who would sell his soul (if he had one) for drink, and whose every word is a lie,—what men are safe if this is done? Oh, it's a good beginning!"

"I *will* speak!" cried Newman, standing on tiptoe to look over Tim's head, who had interposed to prevent him. "Hallo, you sir—old Nickleby! what do you mean when you talk of 'a fellow like this?' Who made me 'a fellow like this?' If I would sell my soul for drink, why wasn't I a thief, swindler, housebreaker, area sneak, robber of pence out of the trays of blind men's dogs, rather than your drudge and packhorse? If my every word was a lie, why

wasn't I a pet and favourite of yours? Lie! When did I ever cringe and fawn to you—eh? Tell me that! I served you faithfully. I did more work because I was poor, and took more hard words from you because I despised you and them, than any man you could have got from the parish workhouse. I did. I served you because I was proud; because I was a lonely man with you, and there were no other drudges to see my degradation; and because nobody knew, better than you, that I was a ruined man: that I hadn't always been what I am: and that I might have been better off, if I hadn't been a fool, and fallen into the hands of you and others who were knaves. Do you deny that—eh?"

"Gently," reasoned Tim; "you said you wouldn't."

"I said I wouldn't!" cried Newman, thrusting him aside, and moving his hand as Tim moved, so as to keep him at arm's length. "Don't tell me! Here, you Nickleby! don't pretend not to mind me; it won't do; I know better. You were talking of tampering just now. Who tampered with Yorkshire schoolmasters, and, while they sent the drudge out, that he shouldn't overhear, forgot that such great caution might render him suspicious, and that he might watch his master out at nights, and might set other eyes to watch the schoolmaster? Who tampered with a selfish father, urging him to sell his daughter to old Arthur Gride, and tampered with Gride too, and did so in the little office, *with a closet in the room?*"

Ralph had put a great command upon himself; but he could not have suppressed a slight start, if he had been certain to be beheaded for it next moment.

"Aha!" cried Newman, "you mind me now, do you? What first set this fag to be jealous of his master's actions, and to feel that, if he hadn't crossed him when he might, he would have been as bad as he, or worse? That master's cruel treatment of his own flesh and blood, and vile designs upon a young girl who interested even his broken-down, drunken, miserable hack, and made him linger in his service, in the hope of doing her some good (as, thank God, he had done others once or twice before), when he would, otherwise, have relieved his feelings by pummelling his master soundly, and then going to the Devil. He would—mark that; and mark this—that I'm here now, because these gentlemen thought it best. When I sought them out (as I did—there was no tampering with me), I told them I wanted help to find you out, to trace you down, to go through with what I had begun, to help the right; and that, when I had done it, I'd burst into your room and tell you all, face to face, man to man, and like a man. Now I've said my say, and let anybody else say theirs, and fire away!"

With this concluding sentiment, Newman Noggs, who had been perpetually sitting down and getting up again all through his speech, which he had delivered in a series of jerks; and who was, from the violent exercise and the excitement combined, in a state of most intense and fiery heat; became, without passing through any intermediate stage, stiff, upright, and motionless, and so remained, staring at Ralph Nickleby with all his might and main.

Ralph looked at him for an instant, and for an instant only; then, waved his hand, and, beating the ground with his foot, said in a choking voice:

"Go on, gentlemen, go on! I'm patient, you see. There's law to be had, there's law. I shall call you to an account for this. Take care what you say; I shall make you prove it."

"The proof is ready," returned brother Charles, "quite ready to our hands. The man Snawley, last night, made a confession."

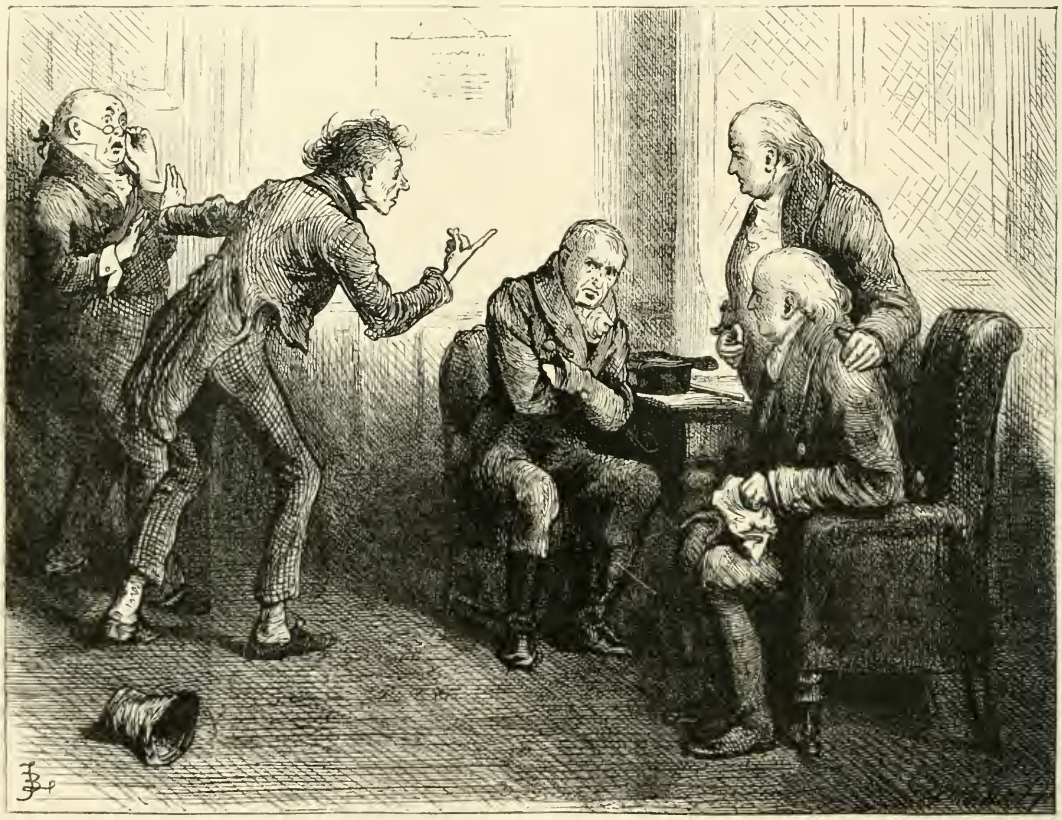
"Who may 'the man Snawley' be," returned Ralph, "and what may his 'confession' have to do with my affairs?"

To this inquiry, put with a dogged inflexibility of manner, the old gentleman returned no answer, but went on to say that, to show him how much they were in earnest, it would be necessary to tell him, not only what accusations were made against him, but what proof of them they had, and how that proof had been acquired. This laying open of the whole question brought up brother Ned, Tim Linkinwater, and Newman Noggs, all three at once, who, after a vast deal of talking together, and a scene of great confusion, laid before Ralph, in distinct terms, the following statement.

That, Newman, having been solemnly assured, by one not then producible, that Smike was not the son of Snawley, and this person having offered to make oath to that effect, if necessary, they had by this communication been first led to doubt the claim set up, which they would otherwise have seen no reason to dispute, supported as it was by evidence which they had no power of disproving. That, once suspecting the existence of a conspiracy, they had no difficulty in tracing back its origin to the malice of Ralph, and the vindictiveness and avarice of Squeers. That, suspicion and proof being two very different things, they had been advised by a lawyer, eminent for his

sagacity and acuteness in such practice, to resist the proceedings taken on the other side for the recovery of the youth as slowly and artfully as possible, and meanwhile to beset Snawley (with whom it was clear the main falsehood must rest); to lead him, if possible, into contradictory and conflicting statements; to harass him by all available means; and so to practise on his fears, and regard for his own safety, as to induce him to divulge the whole scheme, and to give up his employer, and whomsoever else he could implicate. That, all this had been skilfully done; but that Snawley, who was well practised in the arts of low cunning and intrigue, had successfully baffled all their attempts, until an unexpected circumstance had brought him, last night, upon his knees.

It thus arose. When Newman Noggs reported that Squeers was again in town, and that an interview of such secrecy had taken



"WHO TAMPERED WITH A SELFISH FATHER, URGING HIM TO SELL HIS DAUGHTER TO OLD ARTHUR GRIDE, AND TAMPERED WITH GRIDE TOO, AND DID SO IN THE LITTLE OFFICE, WITH A CLOSET IN THE ROOM?"

place between him and Ralph that he had been sent out of the house, plainly lest he should overhear a word, a watch was set upon the schoolmaster, in the hope that something might be discovered which would throw some light upon the suspected plot. It being found, however, that he held no further communication with Ralph, nor any with Snawley, and lived quite alone, they were completely at fault; the watch was withdrawn, and they would have observed his motions no longer, if it had not happened that, one night, Newman stumbled unobserved on him and Ralph in the street together. Following them, he discovered, to his surprise, that they repaired to various low lodging-houses and taverns kept by broken gamblers, to more than one of whom Ralph was known, and that they were in pursuit—so he found by inquiries when they had left—of an old woman whose description exactly tallied with that of deaf Mrs. Sliderskew. Affairs now appearing to assume a more serious complexion, the watch

was renewed with increased vigilance; an officer was procured, who took up his abode in the same tavern with Squeers; and by him and Frank Cheeryble the footsteps of the unconscious schoolmaster were dogged, until he was safely housed in the lodging at Lambeth. Mr. Squeers having shifted his lodging, the officer shifted his, and lying concealed in the same street, and, indeed, in the opposite house, soon found that Mr. Squeers and Mrs. Sliderskew were in constant communication.

In this state of things Arthur Gride was appealed to. The robbery, partly owing to the inquisitiveness of the neighbours, and partly to his own grief and rage, had, long ago, become known; but he positively refused to give his sanction or yield any assistance to the old woman's capture, and was seized with such a panic at the idea of being called upon to give evidence against her, that he shut himself up close in his house, and refused to hold communication with anybody. Upon this, the pursuers took counsel together, and, coming so near the truth as to arrive at the conclusion that Gride and Ralph, with Squeers for their instrument, were negotiating for the recovery of some of the stolen papers which would not bear the light, and might possibly explain the hints relative to Madeline which Newman had overheard, resolved that Mrs. Sliderskew should be taken into custody before she had parted with them: and Squeers too, if anything suspicious could be attached to him. Accordingly, a search-warrant being procured, and all prepared, Mr. Squeers's window was watched, until his light was put out, and the time arrived when, as had been previously ascertained, he usually visited Mrs. Sliderskew. This done, Frank Cheeryble and Newman stole up-stairs to listen to their discourse, and to give the signal to the officer at the most favourable time. At what an opportune moment they arrived, how they listened, and what they heard, is already known to the reader. Mr. Squeers, still half stunned, was hurried off with a stolen deed in his possession, and Mrs. Sliderskew was apprehended likewise. The information being promptly carried to Snawley that Squeers was in custody—he was not told for what—that worthy, first extorting a promise that he should be kept harmless, declared the whole tale concerning Smike to be a fiction and forgery, and implicated Ralph Nickleby to the fullest extent. As to Mr. Squeers, he had, that morning, undergone a private examination before a magistrate; and, being unable to account satisfactorily for his possession of the deed or his companionship with Mrs. Sliderskew, had been, with her, remanded for a week.

All these discoveries were now related to Ralph circumstantially, and in detail. Whatever impression they secretly produced, he suffered no sign of emotion to escape him, but sat perfectly still, not raising his frowning eyes from the ground, and covering his mouth with his hand. When the narrative was concluded, he raised his head hastily, as if about to speak, but, on brother Charles resuming, fell into his old attitude again.

"I told you this morning," said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon his brother's shoulder, "that I came to you in mercy. How far you may be implicated in this last transaction, or how far the person who is now in custody may criminate you, you best know. But, justice must take its course against the parties implicated in the plot against this poor, unoffending, injured lad. It is not in my power, or in the power of my brother Ned, to save you from the consequences. The utmost we can do is, to warn you in time, and to give you an opportunity of escaping them. We would not have an old man like you disgraced and punished by your near relation; nor would we have him forget, like you, all ties of blood and nature. We entreat you—brother Ned, you join me, I know, in this entreaty, and so, Tim Linkinwater, do you, although you pretend to be an obstinate dog, sir, and sit there frowning as if you didn't—we entreat you to retire from London, to take shelter in some place where you will be safe from the consequences of these wicked designs, and where you may have time, sir, to atone for them, and to become a better man."

"And do you think," returned Ralph, rising, "and do you think you will so easily crush *me*? Do you think that a hundred well-arranged plans, or a hundred suborned witnesses, or a hundred false curs at my heels, or a hundred canting speeches full of oily words, will move me? I thank you for disclosing your schemes, which I am now prepared for. You have not the man to deal with that you think; try me! and remember that I spit upon your fair words and false dealings, and dare you—provoke you—taunt you—to do to me the very worst you can!"

Thus they parted, for that time; but the worst had not come yet.

CHAPTER LX.

THE DANGERS THICKEN, AND THE WORST IS TOLD.

INSTEAD of going home, Ralph threw himself into the first street cabriolet he could find, and, directing the driver towards the police-office of the district in which Mr. Squeers's misfortunes had occurred, alighted at a short distance from it, and, discharging the man, went the rest of his way thither on foot. Inquiring for the object of his solicitude, he learnt that he had timed his visit well; for Mr. Squeers was, in fact, at that moment waiting for a hackney coach he had ordered, and in which he purposed proceeding to his week's retirement like a gentleman.

Demanding speech with the prisoner, he was ushered into a kind of waiting-room in which, by reason of his scholastic profession and superior respectability, Mr. Squeers had been permitted to pass the day. Here, by the light of a guttering and blackened candle, he could barely discern the schoolmaster, fast asleep on a bench in a remote corner. An empty glass stood on a table before him, which, with his somnolent condition and a very strong smell of brandy-and-water, forewarned the visitor that Mr. Squeers had been seeking, in creature comforts, a temporary forgetfulness of his unpleasant situation.

It was not a very easy matter to rouse him: so lethargic and heavy were his slumbers. Regaining his faculties by slow and faint glimmerings, he at length sat upright; and, displaying a very yellow face, a very red nose, and a very bristly beard: the joint effect of which was considerably heightened by a dirty white handkerchief, spotted with blood, drawn over the crown of his head and tied under his chin: stared ruefully at Ralph in silence, until his feelings found a vent in this pithy sentence:

"I say, young fellow, you've been and done it now; you have!"

"What's the matter with your head?" asked Ralph.

"Why, your man, your informing, kidnapping man, has been and broke it," rejoined Squeers sulkily; "that's what's the matter with it. You've come at last, have you?"

"Why have you not sent to me?" said Ralph. "How could I come till I knew what had befallen you?"

"My family!" hiccuped Mr. Squeers, raising his eye to the ceiling: "my daughter, as is at that age when all the sensibilities is a-coming out strong in blow—my son, as is the young Norval of private life, and the pride and ornament of a doting willage—here's a shock for my family! The coat-of-arms of the Squeerses is tore, and their sun is gone down into the ocean wave!"

"You have been drinking," said Ralph, "and have not yet slept yourself sober."

"I haven't been drinking *your* health, my codger," replied Mr. Squeers; "so you have nothing to do with that."

Ralph suppressed the indignation which the schoolmaster's altered and insolent manner awakened, and asked again why he had not sent to him.

"What should I get by sending to you?" returned Squeers. "To be known to be in with you wouldn't do me a deal of good, and they won't take bail till they know something more of the case, so here am I hard and fast: and there are you loose and comfortable."

"And so must you be in a few days," retorted Ralph with affected good-humour. "They can't hurt you, man."

"Why, I suppose they can't do much to me, if I explain how it was that I got into the good company of that there ca-daverous old Slider," replied Squeers viciously, "who I wish was dead and buried, and resurrected and dissected, and hung upon wires in a anatomical museum, before ever I'd had anything to do with her. This is what him with the powdered head says this morning, in so many words—'Prisoner! As you have been found in company with this woman; as you were detected in possession of this document; as you were engaged with her in fraudulently destroying others, and can give no satisfactory account of yourself; I shall remand you for a week, in order that inquiries may be made, and evidence got—and meanwhile I can't take any bail for your appearance.' Well, then, what I say now is, that I *can* give a satisfactory account of myself; I can hand in the card of my establishment, and say, 'I am the Wackford Squeers as is therein named, sir. I am the man as is guaranteed, by unimpeachable references, to be a out-and-outer in morals and uprightness of principle. Whatever is wrong in this business is no fault of mine. I had no evil design in it, sir. I was not aware that anything was wrong. I was merely employed by a friend—my friend Mr. Ralph Nickleby, of Golden Square. Send for him, sir, and ask him what he has to say—he's the man; not me!'"

"What document was it that you had?" asked Ralph, evading, for the moment, the point just raised.

"What document? Why, *the* document," re-

plied Squeers. "The Madeline What's-her-name one. It was a will; that's what it was."

"Of what nature, whose will, when dated, how benefiting her, to what extent?" asked Ralph hurriedly.

"A will in her favour; that's all I know," rejoined Squeers, "and that's more than you'd have known, if you'd had them bellows on your head. It's all owing to your precious caution that they got hold of it. If you had let me burn it, and taken my word that it was gone, it would have been a heap of ashes behind the fire, instead of being whole and sound, inside of my great-coat."

"Beaten at every point!" muttered Ralph.

"Ah!" sighed Squeers, who, between the brandy-and-water and his broken head, wandered strangely, "at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry—this is a altered state of trigonomics, this is! A double l—all, everything—a cobbler's weapon. U-p—up, adjective, not down. S-q-u- double e-r-s, noun substantive, a educator of youth. Total, all up with Squeers!"

His running on in this way had afforded Ralph an opportunity of recovering his presence of mind, which at once suggested to him the necessity of removing, as far as possible, the schoolmaster's misgivings, and leading him to believe that his safety and best policy lay in the preservation of a rigid silence.

"I tell you, once again," he said, "they can't hurt you. You shall have an action for false imprisonment, and make a profit of this, yet. We will devise a story for you that should carry you through twenty times such a trivial scrape as this; and, if they want security in a thousand pounds for your reappearance in case you should be called upon, you shall have it. All you have to do is to keep back the truth. You're a little fuddled to-night, and may not be able to see this as clearly as you would at another time; but this is what you must do, and you'll need all your senses about you; for a slip might be awkward."

"Oh!" said Squeers, who had looked cunningly at him, with his head stuck on one side, like an old raven. "That's what I'm to do, is it? Now then, just you hear a word or two from me. I an't a-going to have any stories made for me, and I an't a-going to stick to any. If I find matters going again me, I shall expect you to take your share, and I'll take care you do. You never said anything about danger. I never bargained for being brought into such a plight as this, and I don't mean to take it as quiet as you think. I let you lead me on, from one thing to another, because we had been mixed up together in a certain sort of a way, and if you had liked to be ill-natured you might perhaps have hurt the business, and if you liked to be good-natured you might throw a good deal in my way. Well; if all goes right now, that's quite correct, and I don't mind it; but, if anything goes wrong, then times are altered, and I shall just say and do whatever I think may serve me most, and take advice from nobody. My moral influence with them lads," added Mr. Squeers with deeper gravity, "is a tottering to its basis. The images of Mrs. Squeers, my daughter, and my son Wackford, all short of vittles, is perpetually before me; every other consideration melts away and vanishes, in front of these; the only number in all arithmetic that I know of, as a husband and a father, is number one, under this here most fatal go!"

How long Mr. Squeers might have declaimed, or how stormy a discussion his declamation might have led to, nobody knows. Being interrupted, at this point, by the arrival of the coach and an attendant who was to bear him company, he perched his hat with great dignity on the top of the handkerchief that bound his head; and, thrusting one hand in his pocket, and taking the attendant's arm with the other, suffered himself to be led forth.

"As I supposed from his not sending!" thought Ralph. "This fellow, I plainly see through all his tipsy fooling, has made up his mind to turn upon me. I am so beset and hemmed in, that they are not only all struck with fear, but, like the beasts in the fable, have their fling at me now, though time was, and no longer ago than yesterday too, when they were all civility and compliance. But they shall not move me. I'll not give way. I will not budge one inch!"

He went home, and was glad to find his housekeeper complaining of illness, that he might have an excuse for being alone, and sending her away to where she lived: which was hard by. Then, he sat down by the light of a single candle, and began to think, for the first time, on all that had taken place that day.

He had neither eaten nor drunk since last night, and, in addition to the anxiety of mind he had undergone, had been travelling about from place to place, almost incessantly, for many hours. He felt sick and exhausted, but

could taste nothing save a glass of water, and continued to sit with his head upon his hand—not resting nor thinking, but laboriously trying to do both, and feeling that every sense but one of weariness and desolation was for the time benumbed.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he heard a knocking at the door, and still sat quiet as before, as if he could not even bring his thoughts to bear upon that. It had been often repeated, and he had, several times, heard a voice outside, saying there was a light in the window (meaning, as he knew, his own candle), before he could rouse himself and go down-stairs.

"Mr. Nickleby, there is terrible news for you, and I am sent to beg you will come with me directly," said a voice he seemed to recognise. He held his hand above his eyes, and, looking out, saw Tim Linkinwater on the steps.

"Come where?" demanded Ralph.

"To our house—where you came this morning. I have a coach here."

"Why should I go there?" said Ralph.

"Don't ask me why, but pray come with me."

"TOTAL, ALL UP WITH SQUEERS!"

"Another edition of to-day!" returned Ralph, making as though he would shut the door.

"No, no!" cried Tim, catching him by the arm and speaking most earnestly; "it is only that you may hear something that has occurred—something very dreadful, Mr. Nickleby, which concerns you nearly. Do you think I would tell you so or come to you like this, if it were not the case?"

Ralph looked at him more closely. Seeing that he was indeed greatly excited, he faltered, and could not tell what to say or think.

"You had better hear this now than at any other time," said Tim; "it may have some influence with you. For Heaven's sake come!"

Perhaps, at another time, Ralph's obstinacy and dislike would have been proof against any appeal from such a quarter, however emphatically urged; but now, after a moment's hesitation, he went into the hall for his hat, and, returning, got into the coach without speaking a word.

Tim well remembered afterwards, and often said, that, as Ralph Nickleby went into the house for this purpose, he saw him, by the light of the candle which he had set down upon a

chair, reel and stagger like a drunken man. He well remembered, too, that when he had placed his foot upon the coach steps, he turned round and looked upon him with a face so ashy pale, and so very wild and vacant, that it made him shudder, and for the moment almost afraid to follow. People were fond of saying that he had some dark presentiment upon him then, but his emotion might, perhaps, with greater show of reason, be referred to what he had undergone that day.

A profound silence was observed during the ride. Arrived at their place of destination, Ralph followed his conductor into the house, and into a room where the two brothers were. He was so astounded, not to say awed, by something of a mute compassion for himself which was visible in their manner, and in that of the old clerk, that he could scarcely speak.

Having taken a seat, however, he contrived to say, though in broken words, "What—what have you to say to me—more than has been said already?"

The room was old and large, very imperfectly lighted, and terminated in a bay window, about which hung some heavy drapery. Casting his eyes in this direction as he spoke, he thought he made out the dusky figure of a man. He was confirmed in this impression by seeing that the object moved, as if uneasy under his scrutiny.

"Who's that yonder?" he said.

"One who has conveyed to us, within these two hours, the intelligence which caused our sending to you," replied brother Charles. "Let him be, sir, let him be for the present."

"More riddles!" said Ralph faintly. "Well, sir?"

In turning his face towards the brothers he was obliged to avert it from the window; but, before either of them could speak, he had looked round again. It was evident that he was rendered restless and uncomfortable by the presence of the unseen person; for he repeated this action several times, and at length, as if in a nervous state which rendered him positively unable to turn away from the place, sat so as to have it opposite him, muttering as an excuse that he could not bear the light.

The brothers conferred apart for a short time: their manner showing that they were agitated. Ralph glanced at them twice or thrice, and ultimately said, with a great effort to recover his self-possession, "Now, what is this? If I am brought from home at this time of night, let it be for something. What have you got to tell me?" After a short pause he added, "Is my niece dead?"

He had struck upon a key which rendered the task of commencement an easier one. Brother Charles turned, and said that it was a death of which they had to tell him, but that his niece was well.

"You don't mean to tell me," said Ralph as his eyes brightened, "that her brother's dead? No, that's too good. I'd not believe it, if you told me so. It would be too welcome news to be true."

"Shame on you, you hardened and unnatural man!" cried the other brother warmly. "Prepare yourself for intelligence which, if you have any human feeling in your breast, will make even you shrink and tremble. What if we tell you that a poor unfortunate boy: a child in everything but never having known one of those tender endearments, or one of those lightsome hours, which make our childhood a time to be remembered like a happy dream through all our after life: a warm-hearted, harmless, affectionate creature, who never offended you, or did you wrong, but on whom you have vented the malice and hatred you have conceived for your nephew, and whom you have made an instrument for wreaking your bad passions upon him: what if we tell you that, sinking under your persecution, sir, and the misery and ill-usage of a life short in years, but long in suffering, this poor creature has gone to tell his sad tale where, for your part in it, you must surely answer?"

"If you tell me," said Ralph; "if you tell me that he is dead, I forgive you all else. If you tell me that he is dead, I am in your debt and bound to you for life. He is! I see it in your faces. Who triumphs now? Is this your dreadful news; this your terrible intelligence? You see how it moves me. You did well to send. I would have travelled a hundred miles afoot, through mud, mire, and darkness, to hear this news just at this time."

Even then, moved as he was by this savage joy, Ralph could see in the faces of the two brothers, mingling with their look of disgust and horror, something of that indefinable compassion for himself which he had noticed before.

"And *he* brought you the intelligence, did he?" said Ralph, pointing with his finger towards the recess already mentioned; "and sat there, no doubt, to see me prostrated and overwhelmed by it! Ha, ha, ha! But I tell him that I'll be a sharp thorn in his side for many a long day to come; and I tell you two, again, that you don't know him yet; and that you'll rue the day you took compassion on the vagabond."

"You take me for your nephew," said a hollow voice; "it would be better for you, and for me too, if I were he indeed."

The figure that he had seen so dimly, rose, and came slowly down. He started back, for he found that he confronted—not Nicholas, as he had supposed, but Brooker.

Ralph had no reason, that he knew, to fear this man; he had never feared him before; but the pallor which had been observed in his face, when he issued forth that night, came upon him again. He was seen to tremble, and his voice changed as he said, keeping his eyes upon him:

"What does this fellow here? Do you know he is a convict—a felon—a common thief?"

"Hear what he has to tell you—oh, Mr. Nickleby, hear what he has to tell you, be he what he may!" cried the brothers with such emphatic earnestness, that Ralph turned to them in wonder. They pointed to Brooker. Ralph again gazed at him: as it seemed mechanically.

"That boy," said the man, "that these gentlemen have been talking of——"

"That boy," repeated Ralph, looking vacantly at him.

"—Whom I saw stretched dead and cold upon his bed, and who is now in his grave——"

"Who is now in his grave," echoed Ralph, like one who talks in his sleep.

The man raised his eyes, and clasped his hands solemnly together:

"—Was your only son, so help me God in heaven!"

In the midst of a dead silence, Ralph sat down, pressing his two hands upon his temples. He removed them, after a minute, and never was there seen, part of a living man undisfigured by any wound, such a ghastly face as he then disclosed. He looked at Brooker, who was by this time standing at a short distance from him; but did not say one word, or make the slightest sound or gesture.

"Gentlemen," said the man, "I offer no excuses for myself. I am long past that. If, in telling you how this has happened, I tell you that I was harshly used, and perhaps driven out of my real nature, I do it only as a necessary part of my story, and not to shield myself. I am a guilty man."

He stopped, as if to recollect, and looking away from Ralph, and addressing himself to the brothers, proceeded in a subdued and humble tone:

"Among those who once had dealings with this man, gentlemen—that's from twenty to five-and-twenty years ago—there was one, a rough fox-hunting, hard-drinking gentleman, who had run through his own fortune, and wanted to squander away that of his sister: they were both orphans, and she lived with him and managed his house. I don't know whether it was, originally, to back his influence and try to over-persuade the young woman or not, but he," pointing to Ralph, "used to go down to the house in Leicestershire pretty often, and stop there many days at a time. They had had a great many dealings together, and he may have gone on some of those, or to patch up his client's affairs, which were in a ruinous state: of course he went for profit. The gentlewoman was not a girl, but she was, I have heard say, handsome, and entitled to a pretty large property. In course of time he married her. The same love of gain which led him to contract this marriage, led to its being kept strictly private; for a clause in her father's will declared that, if she married without her brother's consent, the property, in which she had only some life interest while she remained single, should pass away altogether to another branch of the family. The brother would give no consent that the sister didn't buy, and pay for handsomely; Mr. Nickleby would consent to no such sacrifice; and so they went on, keeping their marriage secret, and waiting for him to break his neck or die of a fever. He did neither, and, meanwhile, the result of this private marriage was a son. The child was put out to nurse a long way off; his mother never saw him but once or twice, and then by stealth; and his father—so eagerly did he thirst after the money which seemed to come almost within his grasp now, for his brother-in-law was very ill, and breaking more and more every day—never went near him, to avoid raising any suspicion. The brother lingered on; Mr. Nickleby's wife constantly urged him to avow their marriage; he peremptorily refused. She remained alone in a dull country house: seeing little or no company but riotous, drunken sportsmen. He lived in London, and clung to his business. Angry quarrels and recriminations took place, and when they had been married nearly seven years, and were within a few weeks of the time when the brother's death would have adjusted all, she eloped with a younger man, and left him."

Here he paused, but Ralph did not stir, and the brothers signed to him to proceed.

"It was then that I became acquainted with these circumstances from his own lips. They were no secrets then; for the brother, and others, knew them; but they were communi-

cated to me—not on this account, but because I was wanted. He followed the fugitives—some said to make money of his wife's shame, but, I believe, to take some violent revenge, for that was as much his character as the other—perhaps more. He didn't find them, and she died not long after. I don't know whether he began to think he might like the child, or whether he wished to make sure that it should never fall into its mother's hands; but, before he went, he intrusted me with the charge of bringing it home. And I did so."

He went on, from this point, in a still more humble tone, and spoke in a very low voice: pointing to Ralph as he resumed.

"He had used me ill—cruelly—I reminded him in what not long ago, when I met him in the street—and I hated him. I brought the child home to his own house, and lodged him in the front garret. Neglect had made him very sickly, and I was obliged to call in a doctor, who said he must be removed for change of air, or he would die. I think that first put it in my head. I did it then. He was gone six weeks, and, when he came back, I told him—with every circumstance well planned and proved; nobody could have suspected me—that the child was dead and buried. He might have been disappointed in some intention he had formed, or he might have had some natural affection, but he *was* grieved at *that*, and I was confirmed in my design of opening up the secret one day, and making it a means of getting money from him. I had heard, like most other men, of Yorkshire schools. I took the child to one kept by a man named Squeers, and left it there. I gave him the name of Smike. Year by year, I paid twenty pounds a year for him for six years: never breathing the secret all the time: for I had left his father's service after more hard usage, and quarrelled with him again. I was sent away from this country. I have been away nearly eight years. Directly I came home again, I travelled down into Yorkshire, and, skulking in the village of an evening-time, made inquiries about the boys at the school, and found that this one, whom I had placed there, had run away with a young man bearing the name of his own father. I sought his father out in London, and, hinting at what I could tell him, tried for a little money to support life; but he repulsed me with threats. I then found out his clerk, and, going on from little to little, and showing him that there were good reasons for communicating with me, learnt what was going on; and it was I who told him that the boy was no son of the man who claimed to be his father. All this time I had never seen the boy. At length I heard from this same source that he was very ill, and where he was. I travelled down there, that I might recall myself, if possible, to his recollection, and confirm my story. I came upon him unexpectedly; but, before I could speak, he knew me—he had good cause to remember me, poor lad!—and I would have sworn to him if I had met him in the Indies. I knew the piteous face I had seen in the little child. After a few days' indecision, I applied to the young gentleman in whose care he was, and I found that he was dead. He knows how quickly he recognised me again, how often he had described me and my leaving him at the school, and how he told him of a garret he recollected: which is the one I have spoken of, and in his father's house to this day. This is my story. I demand to be brought face to face with the schoolmaster, and put to any possible proof of any part of it, and I will show that it's too true, and that I have this guilt upon my soul."

"Unhappy man!" said the brothers. "What reparation can you make for this?"

"None, gentlemen, none! I have none to make, and nothing to hope now. I am old in years, and older still in misery and care. This confession can bring nothing upon me but new suffering and punishment; but I make it, and will abide by it, whatever comes. I have been made the instrument of working out this dreadful retribution upon the head of a man who, in the hot pursuit of his bad ends, has persecuted and hunted down his own child to death. It must descend upon me too. I know it must fall. My reparation comes too late; and neither in this world nor in the next can I have hope again!"

He had hardly spoken, when the lamp, which stood upon the table close to where Ralph was seated, and which was the only one in the room, was thrown to the ground, and left them in darkness. There was some trifling confusion in obtaining another light; the interval was a mere nothing; but, when the light appeared, Ralph Nickleby was gone.

The good brothers and Tim Linkinwater occupied some time in discussing the probability of his return; and, when it became apparent that he would not come back, they hesitated whether or no to send after him. At length, remembering how strangely and silently he had sat in one immovable position during the interview, and thinking he might possibly be ill, they determined, although it was now very late, to send to his house on some pretence. Finding

an excuse in the presence of Brooker, whom they knew not how to dispose of without consulting his wishes, they concluded to act upon this resolution before going to bed.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHEREIN NICHOLAS AND HIS SISTER FORFEIT THE GOOD OPINION OF ALL WORLDLY AND PRUDENT PEOPLE.

ON the next morning after Brooker's disclosure had been made, Nicholas returned home. The meeting between him and those whom he had left there was not without strong emotion on both sides; for they had been informed by his letters of what had occurred: and, besides that his griefs were theirs, they mourned with him the death of one whose forlorn and helpless state had first established a claim upon their compassion, and whose truth of heart and grateful earnest nature had, every day, endeared him to them more and more.

"I am sure," said Mrs. Nickleby, wiping her eyes and sobbing bitterly, "I have lost the best, the most zealous, and most attentive creature that has ever been a companion to me in my life—putting you, my dear Nicholas, and Kate, and your poor papa, and that well-behaved nurse who ran away with the linen and the twelve small forks, out of the question, of course. Of all the tractable, equal-tempered, attached, and faithful beings that ever lived, I believe he was the most so. To look round upon the garden, now, that he took so much pride in, or to go into his room and see it filled with so many of those little contrivances for our comfort that he was so fond of making, and made so well, and so little thought he would leave unfinished—I can't bear it, I cannot really. Ah! This is a great trial to me, a great trial. It will be a comfort to you, my dear Nicholas, to the end of your life, to recollect how kind and good you always were to him; so it will be to me to think what excellent terms we were always upon, and how fond he always was of me, poor fellow! It was very natural you should have been attached to him, my dear—very—and of course you were, and are very much cut up by this. I am sure it's only necessary to look at you, and see how changed you are, to see that; but nobody knows what my feelings are—nobody can—it's quite impossible!"

While Mrs. Nickleby, with the utmost sincerity, gave vent to her sorrows after her own peculiar fashion of considering herself foremost, she was not the only one who indulged such feelings. Kate, although well accustomed to forget herself when others were to be considered, could not repress her grief; Madeline was scarcely less moved than she; and poor, hearty, honest little Miss La Creevy, who had come upon one of her visits while Nicholas was away, and had done nothing, since the sad news arrived, but console and cheer them all, no sooner beheld him coming in at the door than she sat herself down upon the stairs, and, bursting into a flood of tears, refused for a long time to be comforted.

"It hurts me so," cried the poor body, "to see him come back alone. I can't help thinking what he must have suffered himself. I wouldn't mind so much if he gave way a little more; but he bears it so manfully."

"Why, so I should," said Nicholas, "should I not?"

"Yes, yes," replied the little woman, "and bless you for a good creature! But this does seem at first, to a simple soul like me—I know it's wrong to say so, and I shall be sorry for it presently—this does seem such a poor reward for all you have done."

"Nay," said Nicholas gently, "what better reward could I have than the knowledge that his last days were peaceful and happy, and the recollection that I was his constant companion, and was not prevented, as I might have been by a hundred circumstances, from being beside him?"

"To be sure," sobbed Miss La Creevy; "it's very true, and I'm an ungrateful, impious, wicked little fool, I know."

With that, the good soul fell to crying afresh, and, endeavouring to recover herself, tried to laugh. The laugh and the cry, meeting each other thus abruptly, had a struggle for the mastery; the result was, that it was a drawn battle, and Miss La Creevy went into hysterics.

Waiting until they were all tolerably quiet and composed again, Nicholas, who stood in need of some rest after his long journey, retired to his own room, and throwing himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, fell into a sound sleep. When he awoke he found Kate sitting by his bedside, who, seeing that he had opened his eyes, stooped down to kiss him.

"I came to tell you how glad I am to see you home again."

"But I can't tell you how glad I am to see you, Kate."

"We have been wearying so for your return,"

said Kate, "mamma and I, and—and Madeline."

"You said in your last letter that she was quite well," said Nicholas rather hastily, and colouring as he spoke. "Has nothing been said, since I have been away, about any future arrangements that the brothers have in contemplation for her?"

"Oh, not a word!" replied Kate. "I can't think of parting from her without sorrow; and surely, Nicholas, *you* don't wish it!"

Nicholas coloured again, and, sitting down beside his sister on a little couch near the window, said:

"No, Kate, no, I do not. I might strive to disguise my real feelings from anybody but you; but I will tell you that—briefly and plainly, Kate—that I love her."

Kate's eyes brightened, and she was going to make some reply, when Nicholas laid his hand upon her arm, and went on:

"Nobody must know this but you. She last of all."

"Dear Nicholas!"

"Last of all—never, though never is a long day. Sometimes I try to think that the time may come when I may honestly tell her this; but it is so far off, in such distant perspective, so many years must elapse before it comes, and when it does come (if ever) I shall be so unlike what I am now, and shall have so outlived my days of youth and romance—though not, I am sure, of love for her—that even I feel how visionary all such hopes must be, and try to crush them rudely myself, and have the pain over, rather than suffer time to wither them, and keep the disappointment in store. No, Kate! Since I have been absent, I have had, in that poor fellow who is gone, perpetually before my eyes, another instance of the munificent liberality of these noble brothers. As far as in me lies, I will deserve it, and, if I have wavered in my bounden duty to them before, I am now determined to discharge it rigidly, and to put further delays and temptations beyond my reach."

"Before you say another word, dear Nicholas," said Kate, turning pale, "you must hear what I have to tell you. I came on purpose, but I had not the courage. What you say now, gives me new heart." She faltered, and burst into tears.

There was that in her manner which prepared Nicholas for what was coming. Kate tried to speak, but her tears prevented her.

"Come, you foolish girl!" said Nicholas. "Why, Kate, Kate, be a woman! I think I know what you would tell me. It concerns Mr. Frank, does it not?"

Kate sunk her head upon his shoulder, and sobbed out "Yes."

"And he has offered you his hand, perhaps, since I have been away," said Nicholas; "is that it? Yes. Well, well; it's not so difficult, you see, to tell me, after all. He offered you his hand?"

"Which I refused," said Kate.

"Yes; and why?"

"I told him," she said in a trembling voice, "all that I have since found you told mamma; and while I could not conceal from him, and cannot from you, that—that it was a pang and a great trial, I did so firmly, and begged him not to see me any more."

"That's my own brave Kate!" said Nicholas, pressing her to his breast. "I knew you would."

"He tried to alter my resolution," said Kate, "and declared that, be my decision what it might, he would not only inform his uncles of the step he had taken, but would communicate it to you also, directly you returned. I am afraid," she added, her momentary composure forsaking her, "I am afraid I may not have said strongly enough how deeply I felt such disinterested love, and how earnestly I prayed for his future happiness. If you do talk together, I should—I should like him to know that."

"And did you suppose, Kate, when you had made this sacrifice to what you knew was right and honourable, that I should shrink from mine?" said Nicholas tenderly.

"Oh no! not if your position had been the same, but——"

"But it is the same," interrupted Nicholas. "Madeline is not the near relation of our benefactors, but she is closely bound to them by ties as dear; and I was first intrusted with her history, specially because they reposed unbounded confidence in me, and believed that I was as true as steel. How base would it be of me to take advantage of the circumstances which placed her here, or of the slight service I was happily able to render her, and to seek to engage her affections, when the result must be, if I succeeded, that the brothers would be disappointed in their darling wish of establishing her as their own child, and that I must seem to hope to build my fortunes on their compassion for the young creature whom I had so meanly and unworthily entrapped: turning her very gratitude and warmth of heart to my own purpose and account, and trading in her misfortunes! I, too, whose duty, and pride, and

pleasure. Kate, it is to have other claims upon me which I will never forget: and who have the means of a comfortable and happy life already, and have no right to look beyond it! I have determined to remove this weight from my mind. I doubt whether I have not done wrong, even now; and to-day I will, without reserve or equivocation, disclose my real reasons to Mr. Cheeryble, and implore him to take immediate measures for removing this young lady to the shelter of some other roof."

"To-day? so very soon?"

"I have thought of this for weeks, and why should I postpone it? If the scene through which I have just passed has taught me to reflect, and has awakened me to a more anxious and careful sense of duty, why should I wait until the impression has cooled? You would not dissuade me, Kate; now would you?"

"You may grow rich, you know," said Kate.

"I may grow rich!" repeated Nicholas with a mournful smile. "Ay, and I may grow old! But rich or poor, or old or young, we shall ever be the same to each other, and in that our comfort lies. What if we have but one home? It can never be a solitary one to you and me. What if we were to remain so true to these first impressions as to form no others? It is but one more link to the strong chain that binds us together. It seems but yesterday that we were playfellows, Kate, and it will seem but to-morrow when we are staid old people, looking back to these cares as we look back now to those of our childish days: and recollecting with a melancholy pleasure that the time was when they could move us. Perhaps then, when we are quaint old folks, and talk of the times when our step was lighter and our hair not grey, we may be even thankful for the trials that so endeared us to each other, and turned our lives into that current, down which we shall have glided so peacefully and calmly. And, having caught some inkling of our story, the young people about us —as young as you and I are now, Kate—may come to us for sympathy, and pour distresses which hope and inexperience could scarcely feel enough for, into the compassionate ears of the old bachelor brother and his maiden sister."

Kate smiled through her tears as Nicholas drew this picture; but they were not tears of sorrow, although they continued to fall when he had ceased to speak.

"Am I not right, Kate?" he said after a short silence.

"Quite, quite, dear brother; and I cannot tell you how happy I am that I have acted as you would have had me."

"You don't regret?"

"N—n—no," said Kate timidly, tracing some pattern upon the ground with her little foot. "I don't regret having done what was honourable and right, of course; but I do regret that this should have ever happened—at least, sometimes I regret it, and sometimes I—I don't know what I say; I am but a weak girl, Nicholas, and it has agitated me very much."

It is no vaunt to affirm that, if Nicholas had had ten thousand pounds at the minute, he would, in his generous affection for the owner of the blushing cheek and downcast eye, have bestowed its utmost farthing, in perfect forgetfulness of himself, to secure her happiness. But all he could do was to comfort and console her by kind words; and words they were of such love and kindness, and cheerful encouragement, that poor Kate threw her arms about his neck, and declared she would weep no more.

"What man," thought Nicholas proudly, while on his way, soon afterwards, to the brothers' house, "would not be sufficiently rewarded for any sacrifice of fortune by the possession of such a heart as Kate's, which, but that hearts weigh light, and gold and silver heavy, is beyond all praise? Frank has money, and wants no more. Where would it buy him such a treasure as Kate? And yet, in unequal marriages, the rich party is always supposed to make a great sacrifice, and the other to get a good bargain! But I am thinking like a lover, or like an ass: which I suppose is pretty nearly the same."

Checking thoughts so little adapted to the business on which he was bound, by such self-reproofs as this and many others no less sturdy, he proceeded on his way, and presented himself before Tim Linkinwater.

"Ah, Mr. Nickleby!" cried Tim, "God bless you! How d'ye do? Well? Say you're quite well, and never better—do now."

"Quite," said Nicholas, shaking him by both hands.

"Ah!" said Tim, "you look tired, though, now I come to look at you. Hark! there he is! D'ye hear him? That was Dick, the blackbird. He hasn't been himself since you've been gone. He'd never get on without you, now; he takes as naturally to you as he does to me."

"Dick is a far less sagacious fellow than I supposed him, if he thinks I am half so well worthy of his notice as you," replied Nicholas.

"Why, I'll tell you what, sir," said Tim, standing in his favourite attitude, and pointing to the cage with the feather of his pen, "it's a very extraordinary thing about that bird, that

the only people he ever takes the smallest notice of are Mr. Charles and Mr. Ned, and you and me."

Here Tim stopped, and glanced anxiously at Nicholas; then, unexpectedly catching his eye, repeated, "And you and me, sir, and you and me." And then he glanced at Nicholas again, and, squeezing his hand, said, "I am a bad one at putting off anything I am interested in. I didn't mean to ask you, but I should like to hear a few particulars about that poor boy. Did he mention Cheeryble Brothers at all?"

"Yes," said Nicholas, "many and many a time."

"That was right of him," returned Tim, wiping his eyes; "that was very right of him."

"And he mentioned your name a score of times," said Nicholas, "and often bade me carry back his love to Mr. Linkinwater."

"No, no, did he, though?" rejoined Tim, sobbing outright. "Poor fellow! I wish we could have had him buried in town. There isn't such a burying-ground in all London as that little one on the other side of the square—there are counting-houses all round it, and, if you go in there on a fine day, you can see the books and safes through the open windows. And he sent his love to me, did he? I didn't expect he would have thought of me. Poor fellow, poor fellow! His love, too!"

Tim was so completely overcome by this little mark of recollection, that he was quite unequal to any more conversation at the moment. Nicholas therefore slipped quietly out, and went to brother Charles's room.

If he had previously sustained his firmness and fortitude, it had been by an effort which had cost him no little pain; but the warm welcome, the hearty manner, the homely unaffected commiseration, of the good old man went to his heart, and no inward struggle could prevent his showing it.

"Come, come, my dear sir," said the benevolent merchant; "we must not be cast down; no, no. We must learn to bear misfortune, and we must remember that there are many sources of consolation even in death. Every day that this poor lad had lived, he must have been less and less qualified for the world, and more and more unhappy in his own deficiencies. It is better as it is, my dear sir. Yes, yes, yes, it's better as it is."

"I have thought of all that, sir," replied Nicholas, clearing his throat. "I feel it, I assure you."

"Yes, that's well," replied Mr. Cheeryble, who, in the midst of all his comforting, was quite as much taken aback as honest old Tim; "that's well. Where is my brother Ned? Tim Linkinwater, sir, where is my brother Ned?"

"Gone out with Mr. Trimmers, about getting that unfortunate man into the hospital, and sending a nurse to his children," said Tim.

"My brother Ned is a fine fellow—a great fellow!" exclaimed brother Charles as he shut the door and returned to Nicholas. "He will be overjoyed to see you, my dear sir. We have been speaking of you every day."

"To tell you the truth, sir, I am glad to find you alone," said Nicholas with some natural hesitation; "for I am anxious to say something to you. Can you spare me a very few minutes?"

"Surely, surely," returned brother Charles, looking at him with an anxious countenance. "Say on, my dear sir, say on."

"I scarcely know how, or where, to begin," said Nicholas. "If ever one mortal had reason to be penetrated with love and reverence for another: with such attachment as would make the hardest service in his behalf a pleasure and delight: with such grateful recollections as must rouse the utmost zeal and fidelity of his nature: those are the feelings which I should entertain for you, and do, from my heart and soul, believe me!"

"I do believe you," replied the old gentleman, "and I am happy in the belief. I have never doubted it; I never shall. I am sure I never shall."

"Your telling me that so kindly," said Nicholas, "emboldens me to proceed. When you first took me into your confidence, and dispatched me on those missions to Miss Bray, I should have told you that I had seen her long before; that her beauty had made an impression upon me which I could not efface; and that I had fruitlessly endeavoured to trace her, and become acquainted with her history. I did not tell you so, because I vainly thought I could conquer my weaker feelings, and render every consideration subservient to my duty to you."

"Mr. Nickleby," said brother Charles, "you did not violate the confidence I placed in you, or take an unworthy advantage of it. I am sure you did not."

"I did not," said Nicholas firmly. "Although I found that the necessity for self-command and restraint became every day more imperious, and the difficulty greater, I never, for one instant, spoke or looked but as I would have done had you been by. I never, for one moment, deserted my trust, nor have I to this instant. But I find that constant association and companionship with this sweet girl is fatal

to my peace of mind, and may prove destructive to the resolutions I made in the beginning, and up to this time have faithfully kept. In short, sir, I cannot trust myself, and I implore and beseech you to remove this young lady from under the charge of my mother and sister without delay. I know that, to any one but myself—to you, who consider the immeasurable distance between me and this young lady, who is now your ward, and the object of your peculiar care—my loving her, even in thought, must appear the height of rashness and presumption. I know it is so. But who can see her as I have seen,—who can know what her life has been,—and not love her? I have no excuse but that; and, as I cannot fly from this temptation, and cannot repress this passion, with its object constantly before me, what can I do but pray and beseech you to remove it, and to leave me to forget her?"

"Mr. Nickleby," said the old man after a short silence, "you can do no more. I was wrong to expose a young man like you to this trial. I might have foreseen what would happen. Thank you, sir, thank you. Madeline shall be removed."

"If you would grant me one favour, dear sir, and suffer her to remember me with esteem, by never revealing to her this confession——"

"I will take care," said Mr. Cheeryble. "And now, is this all you have to tell me?"

"No!" returned Nicholas, meeting his eye, "it is not."

"I know the rest," said Mr. Cheeryble, apparently very much relieved by this prompt reply. "When did it come to your knowledge?"

"When I reached home this morning."

"You felt it your duty immediately to come to me, and tell me what your sister no doubt acquainted you with?"

"I did," said Nicholas, "though I could have wished to have spoken to Mr. Frank first."

"Frank was with me last night," replied the old gentleman. "You have done well, Mr. Nickleby—very well, sir—and I thank you again."

Upon this head Nicholas requested permission to add a few words. He ventured to hope that nothing he had said would lead to the estrangement of Kate and Madeline, who had formed an attachment for each other, any interruption of which would, he knew, be attended with great pain to them, and, most of all, with remorse and pain to him, as its unhappy cause. When these things were all forgotten, he hoped that Frank and he might still be warm friends, and that no word or thought of his humble home, or of her who was well contented to remain there and share his quiet fortunes, would ever again disturb the harmony between them. He recounted, as nearly as he could, what had passed between himself and Kate that morning: speaking of her with such warmth of pride and affection, and dwelling so cheerfully upon the confidence they had of overcoming any selfish regrets, and living contented and happy in each other's love, that few could have heard him unmoved. More moved himself than he had been yet, he expressed in a few hurried words—as expressive, perhaps, as the most eloquent phrases—his devotion to the brothers, and his hope that he might live and die in their service.

To all this brother Charles listened in profound silence, and with his chair so turned from Nicholas that his face could not be seen. He had not spoken, either, in his accustomed manner, but with a certain stiffness and embarrassment very foreign to it. Nicholas feared he had offended him. He said, "No—no—he had done quite right," but that was all.

"Frank is a heedless, foolish fellow," he said after Nicholas had paused for some time; "a very heedless, foolish fellow. I will take care that this is brought to a close without delay. Let us say no more upon the subject; it's a very painful one to me. Come to me in half an hour; I have strange things to tell you, my dear sir, and your uncle has appointed this afternoon for your waiting upon him with me."

"Waiting upon him! With you, sir!" cried Nicholas.

"Ay, with me," replied the old gentleman. "Return to me in half an hour, and I'll tell you more."

Nicholas waited upon him at the time mentioned, and then learnt all that had taken place on the previous day, and all that was known of the appointment Ralph had made with the brothers; which was for that night; and for the better understanding of which it will be requisite to return, and follow his own footsteps from the house of the twin brothers. Therefore, we leave Nicholas somewhat reassured by the restored kindness of their manner towards him, and yet sensible that it was different from what it had been (though he scarcely knew in what respect): full of uneasiness, uncertainty, and disquiet.

CHAPTER LXII.

RALPH MAKES ONE LAST APPOINTMENT—AND KEEPS IT.

CREEPING from the house, and slinking off like a thief; groping with his hands, when first he got into the street, as if he were a blind man; and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by some one anxious to question or detain him; Ralph Nickleby left the City behind him, and took the road to his own home.

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black, gloomy mass that seemed to follow him: not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and, more than once, stopped to let it pass over; but somehow, when he went forward again, it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up, like a shadowy funeral train.

He had to pass a poor, mean burial-ground—a dismal place, raised a few feet above the level of the street, and parted from it by a low parapet-wall and an iron railing; a rank, unwholesome, rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frouzy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and had struck their roots in the graves of men, sodden, while alive, in steaming courts and drunken hungry dens. And here, in truth, they lay, parted from the living by a little earth and a board or two—lay thick and close—corrupting in body as they had in mind—a dense and squalid crowd. Here they lay, cheek by jowl with life: no deeper down than the feet of the throng that passed there every day, and piled high as their throats. Here they lay, a grisly family, all these dear departed brothers and sisters of the ruddy clergyman who did his task so speedily when they were hidden in the ground!

As he passed here, Ralph called to mind that he had been one of a jury, long before, on the body of a man who had cut his throat; and that he was buried in this place. He could not tell how he came to recollect it now, when he had so often passed and never thought about him, or how it was that he felt an interest in the circumstance; but he did both; and stopping, and clasping the iron railings with his hands, looked eagerly in, wondering which might be his grave.

While he was thus engaged, there came towards him, with noise of shouts and singing, some fellows full of drink, followed by others, who were remonstrating with them, and urging them to go home in quiet. They were in high good-humour; and one of them, a little, weazen, hump-backed man, began to dance. He was a grotesque, fantastic figure, and the few bystanders laughed. Ralph himself was moved to mirth, and echoed the laugh of one who stood near, and who looked round in his face. When they had passed on, and he was left alone again, he resumed his speculation with a new kind of interest; for he recollected that the last person who had seen the suicide alive had left him very merry, and he remembered how strange he and the other jurors had thought that at the time.

He could not fix upon the spot among such a heap of graves, but he conjured up a strong and vivid idea of the man himself, and how he looked, and what had led him to do it; all of which he recalled with ease. By dint of dwelling upon this theme, he carried the impression with him when he went away: as he remembered, when a child, to have had frequently before him the figure of some goblin he had once seen chalked upon a door. But, as he drew nearer and nearer home, he forgot it again, and began to think how very dull and solitary the house would be inside.

This feeling became so strong at last, that, when he reached his own door, he could hardly make up his mind to turn the key and open it. When he had done that, and gone into the passage, he felt as though to shut it again would be to shut out the world. But he let it go, and it closed with a loud noise. There was no light. How very dreary, cold, and still it was!

Shivering from head to foot, he made his way up-stairs into the room where he had been last disturbed. He had made a kind of compact with himself that he would not think of what had happened until he got home. He was at home now, and suffered himself to consider it.

His own child—his own child! He never doubted the tale; he felt it was true; knew it as well, now, as if he had been privy to it all along. His own child! And dead, too! Dying beside Nicholas—loving him, and looking upon him as something like an angel. That was the worst!

They had all turned from him and deserted him in his very first need. Even money could not buy them now; everything must come out, and everybody must know all. Here was the young lord dead, his companion abroad and be-

yond his reach, ten thousand pounds gone at one blow, his plot with Gride overset at the very moment of triumph, his after-schemes discovered, himself in danger, the object of his persecution and Nicholas's love, his own wretched boy; everything crumbled and fallen upon him, and he beaten down beneath the ruins, and grovelling in the dust.

If he had known his child to be alive; if no deceit had been ever practised, and he had grown up beneath his eye; he might have been a careless, indifferent, rough, harsh father—like enough—he felt that; but the thought would come that he might have been otherwise, and that his son might have been a comfort to him, and they two happy together. He began to think, now, that his supposed death and his wife's flight had had some share in making him the morose, hard man he was. He seemed to remember a time when he was not quite so rough and obdurate; and almost thought that he had first hated Nicholas because he was young and gallant, and perhaps like the stripling who had brought dishonour and loss of fortune on his head.

But one tender thought, or one of natural regret, in his whirlwind of passion and remorse, was as a drop of calm water in a stormy, maddened sea. His hatred of Nicholas had been fed upon his own defeat, nourished on his interference with his schemes, fattened upon his old defiance and success. There were reasons for its increase; it had grown and strengthened gradually. Now it attained a height which was sheer wild lunacy. That his, of all others, should have been the hands to rescue his miserable child; that he should have been his protector and faithful friend; that he should have shown him that love and tenderness which, from the wretched moment of his birth, he had never known; that he should have taught him to hate his own parent, and execrate his very name; that he should now know and feel all this, and triumph in the recollection; was gall and madness to the usurer's heart. The dead boy's love for Nicholas, and the attachment of Nicholas to him, was insupportable agony. The picture of his death-bed, with Nicholas at his side, tending and supporting him, and he breathing out his thanks, and expiring in his arms, when he would have had them mortal enemies, and hating each other to the last, drove him frantic. He gnashed his teeth and smote the air, and looking wildly round, with eyes which gleamed through the darkness, cried aloud:

"I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come! Is there no way to rob them of further triumph, and spurn their mercy and compassion? Is there no devil to help me?"

Swiftly there glided again into his brain the figure he had raised that night. It seemed to lie before him. The head was covered now. So it was when he first saw it. The rigid, upturned, marble feet, too, he remembered well. Then came before him the pale and trembling relatives who had told their tale upon the inquest—the shrieks of women—the silent dread of men—the consternation and disquiet—the victory achieved by that heap of clay, which, with one motion of its hand, had let out the life and made this stir among them——

He spoke no more; but, after a pause, softly groped his way out of the room, and up the echoing stairs—up to the top—to the front garret—where he closed the door behind him, and remained.

It was a mere lumber-room now, but it yet contained an old dismantled bedstead; the one on which his son had slept; for no other had ever been there. He avoided it hastily, and sat down as far from it as he could.

The weakened glare of the lights in the street below, shining through the window which had no blind or curtain to intercept it, was enough to show the character of the room, though not sufficient fully to reveal the various articles of lumber, old corded trunks and broken furniture, which were scattered about. It had a shelving roof; high in one part, and at another descending almost to the floor. It was towards the highest part that Ralph directed his eyes; and upon it he kept them fixed steadily for some minutes, when he rose, and, dragging thither an old chest upon which he had been seated, mounted on it, and felt along the wall above his head with both hands. At length they touched a large iron hook, firmly driven into one of the beams.

At that moment he was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door below. After a little hesitation he opened the window, and demanded who it was.

"I want Mr. Nickleby," replied a voice.

"What with him?"

"That's not Mr. Nickleby's voice, surely?" was the rejoinder.

It was not like it; but it was Ralph who spoke, and so he said.

The voice made answer that the twin brothers wished to know whether the man whom he had seen that night was to be detained; and that, although it was now midnight, they had sent, in their anxiety to do right.

"RALPH MAKES ONE LAST APPOINTMENT—AND KEEPS IT."—P. 406.

"Yes," cried Ralph, "detain him till to-morrow; then let them bring him here—him and my nephew—and come themselves, and be sure that I will be ready to receive them."

"At what hour?" asked the voice.

"At any hour," replied Ralph fiercely. "In the afternoon, tell them. At any hour—at any minute—all times will be alike to me."

He listened to the man's retreating footsteps until the sound had passed, and then, gazing up into the sky, saw, or thought he saw, the same black cloud that had seemed to follow him home, and which now appeared to hover directly above the house.

"I know its meaning now," he muttered, "and the restless nights, the dreams, and why I have quailed of late—all pointed to this. Oh! if men, by selling their own souls, could ride rampant for a term, for how short a term would I barter mine to-night!"

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One.

"Lie on!" cried the usurer, "with your iron tongue! Ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already! Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me! Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there, to infect the air!"

With a wild look around, in which frenzy, hatred, and despair were horribly mingled, he shook his clenched hand at the sky above him, which was still dark and threatening, and closed the window.

The rain and hail pattered against the glass; the chimneys quaked and rocked; the crazy casement rattled with the wind, as though an impatient hand inside were striving to burst it open. But no hand was there, and it opened no more.

* * * * *

"How's this?" cried one. "The gentlemen say they can't make anybody hear, and have been trying these two hours."

"And yet he came home last night," said another; "for he spoke to somebody out of that window up-stairs."

They were a little knot of men, and, the window being mentioned, went out into the road to look up at it. This occasioned their observing that the house was still close shut, as the housekeeper had said she had left it on the previous night, and led to a great many suggestions: which terminated in two or three of the boldest getting round to the back, and so entering by a window, while the others remained outside in impatient expectation.

They looked into all the rooms below: opening the shutters as they went, to admit the fading light; and still finding nobody, and everything quiet and in its place, doubted whether they should go farther. One man, however, remarking that they had not yet been into the garret, and that it was there he had been last seen, they agreed to look there too, and went up softly; for the mystery and silence made them timid.

After they had stood for an instant on the landing, eyeing each other, he who had proposed their carrying the search so far, turned the handle of the door, and, pushing it open, looked through the chink, and fell back directly.

"It's very odd," he whispered; "he's hiding behind the door! Look!"

They pressed forward to see; but one among them, thrusting the others aside with a loud exclamation, drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, and dashing into the room, cut down the body.

He had torn a rope from one of the old trunks, and hung himself on an iron hook immediately below the trap-door in the ceiling—in the very place to which the eyes of his son, a lonely, desolate little creature, had so often been directed in childish terror, fourteen years before.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE BROTHERS CHEERYBLE MAKE VARIOUS DECLARATIONS FOR THEMSELVES AND OTHERS. TIM LINKINWATER MAKES A DECLARATION FOR HIMSELF.

SOME weeks had passed, and the first shock of these events had subsided. Madeline had been removed; Frank had been absent; and Nicholas and Kate had begun to try in good earnest to stifle their own regrets, and to live for each other and for their mother—who, poor lady, could in nowise be reconciled to this dull and altered state of affairs—when there came one evening, per favour of Mr. Linkinwater, an invitation from the brothers to dinner on the next day but one: comprehending, not only Mrs. Nickleby, Kate, and Nicholas, but little Miss La Creevy, who was most particularly mentioned.

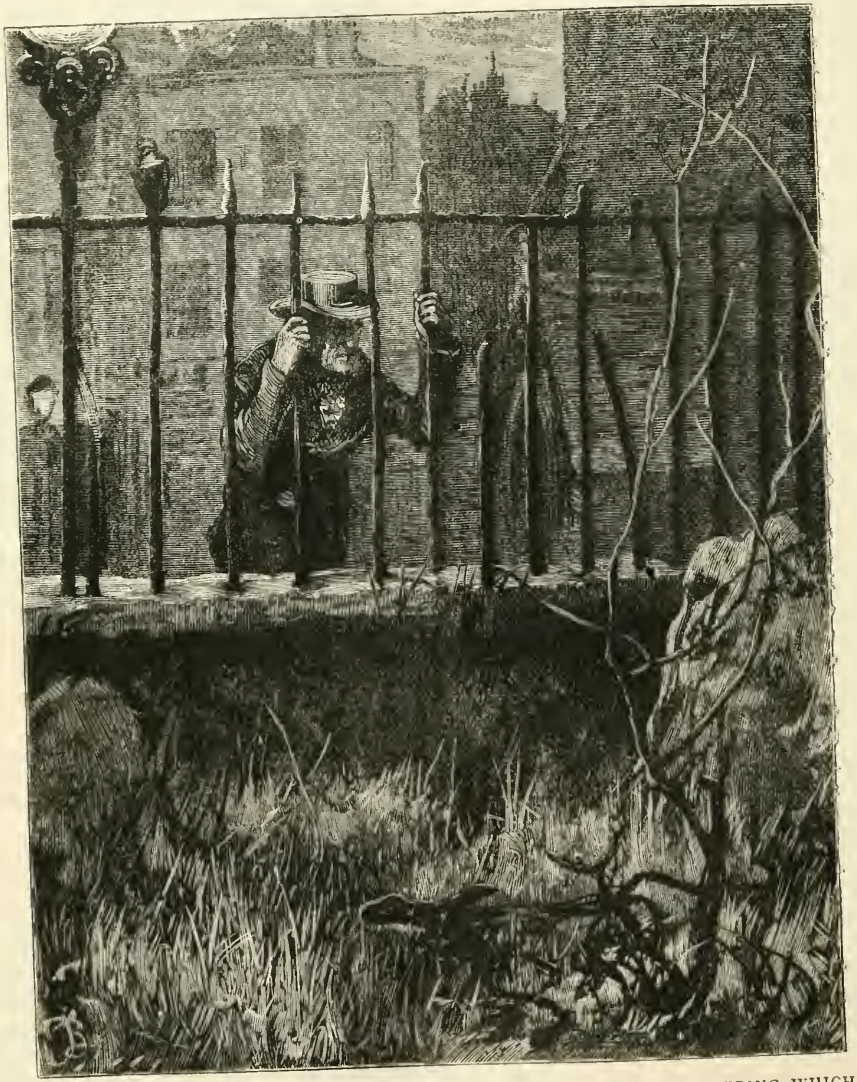
"Now, my dears," said Mrs. Nickleby when they had rendered becoming honour to the bidding, and Tim had taken his departure, "what does *this* mean?"

"What do *you* mean, mother?" asked Nicholas, smiling.

"I say, my dear," rejoined that lady, with a face of unfathomable mystery, "what does this invitation to dinner mean? What is its intention and object?"

"I conclude it means that on such a day we are to eat and drink in their house, and that its intent and object is to confer pleasure upon us," said Nicholas.

"And that's all you conclude it is, my dear?"



"CLASPING THE IRON RAILINGS WITH HIS HANDS, LOOKED EAGERLY IN, WONDERING WHICH MIGHT BE HIS GRAVE."

"I have not yet arrived at anything deeper, mother."

"Then I'll just tell you one thing," said Mrs. Nickleby, "you'll find yourself a little surprised; that's all. You may depend upon it that this means something besides dinner."

"Tea and supper, perhaps," suggested Nicholas.

"I wouldn't be absurd, my dear, if I were you," replied Mrs. Nickleby in a lofty manner, "because it's not by any means becoming, and doesn't suit you at all. What I mean to say is,

that the Mr. Cheerybles don't ask us to dinner with all this ceremony for nothing. Never mind; wait and see. You won't believe anything I say, of course. It's much better to wait; a great deal better; it's satisfactory to all parties, and there can be no disputing. All I say is, remember what I say now, and, when I say I said so, don't say I didn't."

With this stipulation, Mrs. Nickleby, who was troubled, night and day, with a vision of a hot messenger tearing up to the door to announce that Nicholas had been taken into partnership, quitted that branch of the subject, and entered upon a new one.

"It's a very extraordinary thing," she said, "a most extraordinary thing, that they should have invited Miss La Creevy. It quite astonishes me, upon my word it does. Of course it's very pleasant that she should be invited, very pleasant, and I have no doubt that she'll conduct herself extremely well; she always does. It's very gratifying to think that we should have been the means of introducing her into such society, and I'm quite glad of it —quite rejoiced—for she certainly is an exceedingly well-behaved and good-natured little person. I could wish that some friend would mention to her how very badly she has her cap trimmed, and what very preposterous bows those are, but of course that's impossible, and, if she likes to make a fright of herself, no doubt she has a perfect right to do so. We never see ourselves—never do, and never did—and I suppose we never shall."

This moral reflection reminding her of the necessity of being peculiarly smart on the occasion, so as to counterbalance Miss La Creevy, and be herself an effectual set-off and atonement, led Mrs. Nickleby into a consultation with her daughter relative to certain ribbons, gloves, and trimmings: which, being a complicated question, and one of paramount importance, soon routed the previous one, and put it to flight.

The great day arriving, the good lady put herself under Kate's hands an hour or so after breakfast, and, dressing by easy stages, completed her toilet in sufficient time to allow of her daughter's making hers, which was very simple, and not very long, though so satisfactory that she had never appeared more charming, or looked more lovely. Miss La Creevy, too, arrived with two bandboxes (whereof the bottoms fell out as they were handed from the coach) and something in a newspaper, which a gentleman had sat upon, coming down, and which was obliged to be ironed again before it was fit for service. At last everybody was dressed, including Nicholas, who had come home to fetch them, and they went away in a coach sent by the brothers for the purpose; Mrs. Nickleby wondering very much what they would have for dinner, and cross-examining Nicholas as to the extent of his discoveries in the morning; whether he had smelt anything cooking at all like turtle, and, if not, what he had smelt; and diversifying the conversation with reminiscences of dinners to which she had gone some twenty years ago, concerning which she particularised not only the dishes, but the guests, in whom her hearers did not feel a very absorbing interest, as not one of them had ever chanced to hear their names before.

The old butler received them with profound respect and many smiles, and ushered them into the drawing-room, where they were received by the brothers with so much cordiality and kindness that Mrs. Nickleby was quite in a flutter, and had scarcely presence of mind enough even to patronise Miss La Creevy. Kate was still more affected by the reception: for, knowing that the brothers were acquainted with all that had passed between her and Frank, she felt her position a most delicate and trying one, and was trembling on the arm of Nicholas, when Mr. Charles took her in his, and led her to another part of the room.

"Have you seen Madeline, my dear," he said, "since she left your house?"

"No, sir," replied Kate. "Not once."

"And not heard from her, eh? Not heard from her?"

"I have only had one letter," rejoined Kate gently. "I thought she would not have forgotten me quite so soon."

"Ah!" said the old man, patting her on the head, and speaking as affectionately as if she had been his favourite child. "Poor dear! What do you think of this, brother Ned? Madeline has only written to her once—only once, Ned, and she didn't think she would have forgotten her quite so soon, Ned."

"Oh! sad, sad—very sad!" said Ned.

The brothers interchanged a glance, and, looking at Kate for a little time without speaking, shook hands, and nodded as if they were congratulating each other on something very delightful.

"Well, well," said brother Charles, "go into that room, my dear—that door yonder—and see if there's not a letter for you from her. I think there's one upon the table. You needn't hurry back, my love, if there is, for we don't dine just yet, and there's plenty of time—plenty of time."

Kate retired as she was directed. Brother Charles, having followed her graceful figure with his eyes, turned to Mrs. Nickleby, and said—

"We took the liberty of naming one hour before the real dinner-time, ma'am, because we had a little business to speak about, which would occupy the interval. Ned, my dear fellow, will you mention what we agreed upon? Mr. Nickleby, sir, have the goodness to follow me."

Without any further explanation, Mrs. Nickleby, Miss La Creevy, and brother Ned were left alone together, and Nicholas followed brother Charles into his private room; where, to his great astonishment, he encountered Frank, whom he supposed to be abroad.

"Young men," said Mr. Cheeryble, "shake hands!"

"I need no bidding to do that," said Nicholas, extending his.

"Nor I," rejoined Frank as he clasped it heartily.

The old gentleman thought that two handsomer or finer young fellows could scarcely stand side by side than those on whom he looked with so much pleasure. Suffering his eyes to rest upon them for a short time in silence, he said, while he seated himself at his desk:

"I wish to see you friends—close and firm friends—and, if I thought you otherwise, I should hesitate in what I am about to say. Frank, look here! Mr. Nickleby, will you come on the other side?"

The young men stepped up on either hand of brother Charles, who produced a paper from his desk, and unfolded it.

"This," he said, "is a copy of the will of Madeline's maternal grandfather, bequeathing her the sum of twelve thousand pounds, payable either upon her coming of age or marrying. It would appear that this gentleman, angry with her (his only relation) because she would not put herself under his protection, and detach herself from the society of her father, in compliance with his repeated overtures, made a will leaving this property (which was all he possessed) to a charitable institution. He would seem to have repented this determination, however, for three weeks afterwards, and in the same month, he executed this. By some fraud, it was abstracted immediately after his decease, and the other—the only will found—was proved and administered. Friendly negotiations, which have only just now terminated, have been proceeding since this instrument came into our hands, and, as there is no doubt of its authenticity, and the witnesses have been discovered (after some trouble), the money has been refunded. Madeline has therefore obtained her right, and is, or will be, when either of the contingencies which I have mentioned has arisen, mistress of this fortune. You understand me?"

Frank replied in the affirmative. Nicholas, who could not trust himself to speak lest his voice should be heard to falter, bowed his head.

"Now, Frank," said the old gentleman, "you were the immediate means of recovering this deed. The fortune is but a small one; but we love Madeline; and, such as it is, we would rather see you allied to her with that than to any other girl we know who has three times the money. Will you become a suitor to her for her hand?"

"No, sir. I interested myself in the recovery of that instrument, believing that her hand was already pledged to one who has a thousand times the claims upon her gratitude, and, if I mistake not, upon her heart, that I or any other man can ever urge. In this it seems I judged hastily."

"As you always do, sir," cried brother Charles, utterly forgetting his assumed dignity, "as you always do. How dare you think, Frank, that we would have you marry for money, when youth, beauty, and every amiable virtue and excellence were to be had for love? How dared you, Frank, go and make love to Mr. Nickleby's sister without telling us first what you meant to do, and letting us speak for you?"

"I hardly dared to hope——"

"You hardly dared to hope! Then, so much the greater reason for having our assistance! Mr. Nickleby, sir, Frank, although he judged hastily, judged, for once, correctly. Madeline's heart *is* occupied. Give me your hand, sir; it is occupied by you, and worthily and naturally. This fortune is destined to be yours, but you have a greater fortune in her, sir, than you would have in money, were it forty times told. She chooses you, Mr. Nickleby. She chooses as we, her dearest friends, would have her choose. Frank chooses as we would have *him* choose. He should have your sister's little hand, sir, if she had refused it a score of times—ay, he should, and he shall! You acted nobly, not knowing our sentiments, but now you know them, sir, you must do as you are bid. What! You are the children of a worthy gentleman! The time was, sir, when my dear brother Ned and I were two poor simple-hearted boys, wandering, almost barefoot, to seek our

fortunes: are we changed in anything but years and worldly circumstances since that time? No, God forbid! Oh, Ned, Ned, Ned, what a happy day this is for you and me! If our poor mother had only lived to see us now, Ned, how proud it would have made her dear heart at last!"

Thus apostrophized, brother Ned, who had entered with Mrs. Nickleby, and who had been before unobserved by the young men, darted forward, and fairly hugged brother Charles in his arms.

"Bring in my little Kate," said the latter after a short silence. "Bring her in, Ned. Let me see Kate, let me kiss her. I have a right to do so now; I was very near it when she first came; I have often been very near it. Ah! Did you find the letter, my bird? Did you find Madeline herself, waiting for you and expecting you? Did you find that she had not quite forgotten her friend and nurse and sweet companion? Why, this is almost the best of all!"

"Come, come," said Ned, "Frank will be jealous, and we shall have some cutting of throats before dinner."

"Then let him take her away, Ned, let him take her away. Madeline's in the next room. Let all the lovers get out of the way, and talk among themselves, if they've anything to say. Turn 'em out, Ned, every one!"

Brother Charles began the clearance by leading the blushing girl to the door, and dismissing her with a kiss. Frank was not very slow to follow, and Nicholas had disappeared first of all. So there only remained Mrs. Nickleby and Miss La Creevy, who were both sobbing heartily; the two brothers; and Tim Linkinwater, who now came in to shake hands with everybody: his round face all radiant and beaming with smiles.

"Well, Tim Linkinwater, sir," said brother Charles, who was always spokesman, "now the young folks are happy, sir."

"You didn't keep 'em in suspense as long as you said you would, though," returned Tim archly. "Why, Mr. Nickleby and Mr. Frank were to have been in your room for I don't know how long; and I don't know what you weren't to have told them before you came out with the truth."

"Now, did you ever know such a villain as this, Ned?" said the old gentleman. "Did you ever know such a villain as Tim Linkinwater? He accusing me of being impatient, and he the very man who has been wearying us morning, noon, and night, and torturing us for leave to go and tell 'em what was in store, before our plans were half complete, or we had arranged a single thing! A treacherous dog!"

"So he is, brother Charles," returned Ned; "Tim is a treacherous dog. Tim is not to be trusted. Tim is a wild young fellow—he wants gravity and steadiness; he must sow his wild oats, and then perhaps he'll become in time a respectable member of society."

This being one of the standing jokes between the old fellows and Tim, they all three laughed very heartily, and might have laughed much longer, but that the brothers, seeing that Mrs. Nickleby was labouring to express her feelings, and was really overwhelmed by the happiness of the time, took her between them, and led her from the room under pretence of having to consult her on some most important arrangements.

Now, Tim and Miss La Creevy had met very often, and had always been very chatty and pleasant together—had always been great friends—and consequently it was the most natural thing in the world that Tim, finding that she still sobbed, should endeavour to console her. As Miss La Creevy sat on a large old-fashioned window-seat, where there was ample room for two, it was also natural that Tim should sit down beside her; and as to Tim's being unusually spruce and particular in his attire that day, why, it was a high festival and a great occasion, and that was the most natural thing of all.

Tim sat down beside Miss La Creevy, and, crossing one leg over the other so that his foot—he had very comely feet, and happened to be wearing the neatest shoes and black silk stockings possible—should come easily within the range of her eye, said in a soothing way:

"Don't cry!"

"I must," rejoined Miss La Creevy.

"No, don't," said Tim. "Please don't; pray don't."

"I am so happy!" sobbed the little woman.

"Then laugh," said Tim. "Do laugh."

What in the world Tim was doing with his arm, it is impossible to conjecture, but he knocked his elbow against that part of the window which was quite on the other side of Miss La Creevy; and it is clear that it could have no business there.

"Do laugh," said Tim, "or I'll cry."

"Why should you cry?" asked Miss La Creevy, smiling.

"Because I'm happy too," said Tim. "We are both happy, and I should like to do as you do."

Surely there never was a man who fidgeted as Tim must have done then; for he knocked the

window again—almost in the same place—and Miss La Creevy said she was sure he'd break it.

"I knew," said Tim, "that you would be pleased with this scene."

"It was very thoughtful and kind to remember me," returned Miss La Creevy. "Nothing could have delighted me half so much."

Why on earth should Miss La Creevy and Tim Linkinwater have said all this in a whisper? It was no secret. And why should Tim Linkinwater have looked so hard at Miss La Creevy, and why should Miss La Creevy have looked so hard at the ground?

"It's a pleasant thing," said Tim, "to people like us, who have passed all our lives in the world alone, to see young folks that we are fond of brought together with so many years of happiness before them."

"Ah!" cried the little woman with all her heart, "that it is!"

"Although," pursued Tim—"although it makes one feel quite solitary and cast away—now don't it?"

Miss La Creevy said she didn't know. And why should she say she didn't know? Because she must have known whether it did or not.

"It's almost enough to make us get married after all, isn't it?" said Tim.

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Miss La Creevy, laughing. "We are too old."

"Not a bit," said Tim; "we are too old to be single. Why shouldn't we both be married, instead of sitting through the long winter evenings by our solitary firesides? Why shouldn't we make one fireside of it, and marry each other?"

"Oh, Mr. Linkinwater, you're joking!"

"No, no, I'm not. I'm not indeed," said Tim. "I will, if you will. Do, my dear!"

"It would make people laugh so."

"Let 'em laugh," cried Tim stoutly; "we have good tempers I know, and we'll laugh too. Why, what hearty laughs we have had since we've known each other!"

"So we have," cried Miss La Creevy—giving way a little, as Tim thought.

"It has been the happiest time in all my life—at least, away from the counting-house and Cheeryble Brothers," said Tim. "Do, my dear! Now, say you will."

"No, no, we mustn't think of it," returned Miss La Creevy. "What would the brothers say?"

"Why, God bless your soul!" cried Tim innocently, "you don't suppose I should think of such a thing without their knowing it! Why, they left us here on purpose."

"I can never look 'em in the face again!" exclaimed Miss La Creevy faintly.

"Come!" said Tim, "let's be a comfortable couple. We shall live in the old house here, where I have been for four-and-forty year; we shall go to the old church, where I've been, every Sunday morning, all through that time; we shall have all my old friends about us—Dick, the archway, the pump, the flower-pots, and Mr. Frank's children, and Mr. Nickleby's children, that we shall seem like grandfather and grandmother to. Let's be a comfortable couple, and take care of each other! And if we should get deaf, or lame, or blind, or bedridden, how glad we shall be that we have somebody we are fond of, always to talk to and sit with! Let's be a comfortable couple. Now, do, my dear!"

Five minutes after this honest and straightforward speech, little Miss La Creevy and Tim were talking as pleasantly as if they had been married for a score of years, and had never once quarrelled all the time; and five minutes after that, when Miss La Creevy had bustled out to see if her eyes were red and put her hair to rights, Tim moved with a stately step towards the drawing-room, exclaiming as he went, "There an't such another woman in all London—I *know* there an't!"

By this time the apoplectic butler was nearly in fits, in consequence of the unheard-of postponement of dinner. Nicholas, who had been engaged in a manner in which every reader may imagine for himself or herself, was hurrying down-stairs in obedience to his angry summons, when he encountered a new surprise.

On his way down he overtook, in one of the passages, a stranger genteelly dressed in black, who was also moving towards the dining-room. As he was rather lame, and walked slowly, Nicholas lingered behind, and was following him step by step, wondering who he was, when he suddenly turned round and caught him by both hands.

"Newman Noggs!" cried Nicholas joyfully.

"Ah! Newman, your own Newman, your own old faithful Newman! My dear boy, my dear Nick, I give you joy—health, happiness, every blessing. I can't bear it—it's too much, my dear boy—it makes a child of me!"

"Where have you been?" said Nicholas. "What have you been doing? How often have I inquired for you, and been told that I should hear before long!"

"I know, I know!" returned Newman. "They wanted all the happiness to come to-

gether. I've been helping 'em. I—I—— Look at me, Nick, look at me!"

"You would never let *me* do that," said Nicholas in a tone of gentle reproach.

"I didn't mind what I was then. I shouldn't have had the heart to put on gentleman's clothes. They would have reminded me of old times, and made me miserable. I am another man now, Nick. My dear boy, I can't speak—don't say anything to me—don't think the worse of me for these tears—you don't know what I feel to-day; you can't, and never will!"

"OH, MR. LINKINWATER, YOU'RE JOKING!"
"NO, NO, I'M NOT. I'M NOT INDEED," SAID TIM. "I WILL, IF YOU WILL. DO, MY DEAR!"

They walked in to dinner arm-in-arm, and sat down side by side.

Never was such a dinner as that, since the world began. There was the superannuated bank clerk, Tim Linkinwater's friend: and there was the chubby old lady, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and there was so much attention from Tim Linkinwater's sister to Miss La Creevy, and there were so many jokes from the superannuated bank clerk, and Tim Linkin-

water himself was in such tiptop spirits, and little Miss La Creevy was in such a comical state, that of themselves they would have composed the pleasantest party conceivable. Then there was Mrs. Nickleby, so grand and complacent; Madeline and Kate, so blushing and beautiful; Nicholas and Frank, so devoted and proud; and all four so silently and tremblingly happy; there was Newman, so subdued, yet so overjoyed; and there were the twin brothers, so delighted, and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table.

When the first novelty of the meeting had worn off, and they began truly to feel how happy they were, the conversation became more general, and the harmony and pleasure, if possible, increased. The brothers were in a perfect ecstasy; and their insisting on saluting the ladies all round, before they would permit them to retire, gave occasion to the superannuated bank clerk to say so many good things, that he quite outshone himself, and was looked upon as a prodigy of humour.

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, taking her daughter aside as soon as they got up-stairs, "you don't really mean to tell me that this is actually true about Miss La Creevy and Mr. Linkinwater?"

"Indeed it is, mamma."

"Why, I never heard such a thing in my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Nickleby.

"Mr. Linkinwater is a most excellent creature," reasoned Kate, "and, for his age, quite young still."

"For *his* age, my dear!" returned Mrs. Nickleby, "yes; nobody says anything against him, except that I think he is the weakest and most foolish man I ever knew. It's *her* age I speak of. That he should have gone and offered himself to a woman who must be—ah, half as old again as I am—and that she should have dared to accept him! It don't signify, Kate; I'm disgusted with her!"

Shaking her head very emphatically indeed, Mrs. Nickleby swept away; and all the evening, in the midst of the merriment and enjoyment that ensued, and in which, with that exception, she freely participated, conducted herself towards Miss La Creevy in a stately and distant manner, designed to mark her sense of the impropriety of her conduct, and to signify her extreme and cutting disapprobation of the misdemeanour she had so flagrantly committed.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IS RECOGNISED UNDER MELANCHOLY CIRCUMSTANCES, AND DOTHEBOYS HALL BREAKS UP FOR EVER.

NICHOLAS was one of those whose joy is incomplete unless it is shared by the friends of adverse and less fortunate days. Surrounded by every fascination of love and hope, his warm heart yearned towards plain John Browdie. He remembered their first meeting with a smile, and their second with a tear; saw poor Smike once again with the bundle on his shoulder, trudging patiently by his side; and heard the honest Yorkshireman's rough words of encouragement as he left them on their road to London.

Madeline and he sat down, very many times, jointly to produce a letter which should acquaint John at full length with his altered fortunes, and assure him of his friendship and gratitude. It so happened, however, that the letter could never be written. Although they applied themselves to it with the best intentions in the world, it chanced that they always fell to talking about something else, and, when Nicholas tried it by himself, he found it impossible to write one half of what he wished to say, or to pen anything, indeed, which on re-perusal did not appear cold and unsatisfactory compared with what he had in his mind. At last, after going on thus from day to day, and reproaching himself more and more, he resolved (the more readily as Madeline strongly urged him) to make a hasty trip into Yorkshire, and present himself before Mr. and Mrs. Browdie without a word of notice.

Thus it was that, between seven and eight o'clock one evening, he and Kate found themselves in the Saracen's Head booking-office, securing a place to Greta Bridge by the next morning's coach. They had to go westward, to procure some little necessaries for his journey, and, as it was a fine night, they agreed to walk there, and ride home.

The place they had just been in called up so many recollections, and Kate had so many anecdotes of Madeline, and Nicholas so many anecdotes of Frank, and each was so interested in what the other said, and both were so happy and confiding, and had so much to talk about, that it was not until they had plunged for a full half-hour into that labyrinth of streets which lies between Seven Dials and Soho, without emerging into any large thoroughfare, that Nicholas

began to think it just possible they might have lost their way.

The possibility was soon converted into a certainty; for, on looking about, and walking first to one end of the street and then to the other, he could find no landmark he could recognise, and was fain to turn back again in quest of some place at which he could seek a direction.

It was a by-street, and there was nobody about, or in the few wretched shops they passed. Making towards a faint gleam of light which streamed across the pavement from a cellar, Nicholas was about to descend two or three steps so as to render himself visible to those below, and make his inquiry, when he was arrested by a loud noise of scolding in a woman's voice.

"Oh, come away!" said Kate, "they are quarrelling. You'll be hurt."

"Wait one instant, Kate. Let us hear if there's anything the matter," returned her brother. "Hush!"

"You nasty, idle, vicious, good-for-nothing brute!" cried the woman, stamping on the ground, "why don't you turn the mangle?"

"So I am, my life and soul!" replied the man's voice. "I am always turning. I am perpetually turning, like a demd old horse in a demnition mill. My life is one demd horrid grind!"

"Then why don't you go and list for a soldier?" retorted the woman. "You're welcome to."

"For a soldier!" cried the man. "For a soldier! Would his joy and gladness see him in a coarse red coat with a little tail? Would she hear of his being slapped and beat by drummers demnebly? Would she have him fire off real guns, and have his hair cut, and his whiskers shaved, and his eyes turned right and left, and his trousers pipe-clayed?"

"Dear Nicholas," whispered Kate, "you don't know who that is. It's Mr. Mantalini I am confident."

"Do make sure! Peep at him while I ask the way," said Nicholas. "Come down a step or two—come!"

Drawing her after him, Nicholas crept down the steps and looked into a small boarded cellar. There, amidst clothes-baskets and clothes, stripped up to his shirt-sleeves, but wearing still an old patched pair of pantaloons of superlative make, a once brilliant waistcoat, and moustache and whiskers as of yore, but lacking their lustrous dye—there, endeavouring to mollify the wrath of a buxom female—not the lawful Madame Mantalini, but the proprietress of the concern—and grinding meanwhile as if for very life at the mangle, whose creaking noise, mingled with her shrill tones, appeared almost to deafen him—there was the graceful, elegant, fascinating, and once dashing Mantalini.

"Oh, you false traitor!" cried the lady, threatening personal violence on Mr. Mantalini's face.

"False! Oh, dem! Now, my soul, my gentle, captivating, bewitching, and most demnebly enslaving chick-a-biddy, be calm," said Mr. Mantalini humbly.

"I won't!" screamed the woman. "I'll tear your eyes out!"

"Oh! What a demd savage lamb!" cried Mr. Mantalini.

"You're never to be trusted," screamed the woman; "you were out all day yesterday, and gallivanting somewhere, I know—you know you were! Isn't it enough that I paid two pound fourteen for you, and took you out of prison and let you live here like a gentleman, but must you go on like this: breaking my heart besides?"

"I will never break its heart, I will be a good boy, and never do so any more; I will never be naughty again; I beg its little pardon," said Mr. Mantalini, dropping the handle of the mangle, and folding his palms together. "It is all up with its handsome friend! He has gone to the demnition bow-wows. It will have pity? It will not scratch and claw, but pet and comfort? Oh, demmit!"

Very little affected, to judge from her action, by this tender appeal, the lady was on the point of returning some angry reply, when Nicholas, raising his voice, asked his way to Piccadilly.

Mr. Mantalini turned round, caught sight of Kate, and, without another word, leapt at one bound into a bed which stood behind the door, and drew the counterpane over his face: kicking meanwhile convulsively.

"Demmit," he cried in a suffocating voice, "it's little Nickleby! Shut the door, put out the candle, turn me up in the bedstead! Oh, dem, dem, dem!"

The woman looked, first at Nicholas, and then at Mr. Mantalini, as if uncertain on whom to visit this extraordinary behaviour; but Mr. Mantalini happening by ill-luck to thrust his nose from under the bedclothes, in his anxiety to ascertain whether the visitors were gone, she suddenly, and with a dexterity which could only have been acquired by long practice, flung a pretty heavy clothes-basket at him, with so good an aim that he kicked more violently than

before, though without venturing to make any effort to disengage his head, which was quite extinguished. Thinking this a favourable opportunity for departing before any of the torrent of her wrath discharged itself upon him, Nicholas hurried Kate off, and left the unfortunate subject of this unexpected recognition to explain his conduct as he best could.

The next morning he began his journey. It was now cold, winter weather: forcibly recalling to his mind under what circumstances he had first travelled that road, and how many vicissitudes and changes he had since undergone. He was alone inside the greater part of the way, and sometimes, when he had fallen into a doze, and, rousing himself, looked out of the window, and recognised some place which he well remembered as having passed, either on his journey down, or in the long walk back with poor Smike, he could hardly believe but that all which had since happened had been a dream, and that they were still plodding wearily on towards London, with the world before them.

To render these recollections the more vivid, it came on to snow as night set in; and, passing through Stamford and Grantham, and by the little alehouse where he had heard the story of the bold Baron of Grogzwig, everything looked as if he had seen it but yesterday, and not even a flake of the white crust on the roofs had melted away. Encouraging the train of ideas which flocked upon him, he could almost persuade himself that he sat again outside the coach, with Squeers and the boys; that he heard their voices in the air; and that he felt again, but with a mingled sensation of pain and pleasure now, that old sinking of the heart, and longing after home. While he was yet yielding himself up to these fancies he fell asleep, and, dreaming of Madeline, forgot them.

He slept at the inn at Greta Bridge on the night of his arrival, and, rising at a very early hour next morning, walked to the market-town, and inquired for John Browdie's house. John lived in the outskirts, now he was a family man; and, as everybody knew him, Nicholas had no difficulty in finding a boy who undertook to guide him to his residence.

Dismissing his guide at the gate, and in his impatience not even stopping to admire the thriving look of cottage or garden either, Nicholas made his way to the kitchen door, and knocked lustily with his stick.

"Halloa!" cried a voice inside, "wa'at be the matther noo? Be the toon afire? Ding, but thou makkest noise eneaf!"

With these words, John Browdie opened the door himself, and, opening his eyes too to their utmost width, cried, as he clapped his hands together, and burst into a hearty roar:

"Ecod, it be the godfeyther, it be the godfeyther! Tilly, here be Misther Nickleby. Gi' us thee hond, mun. Coom awa', coom awa'. In wi' 'un, doon beside the fire; tak' a soop o' thot. Dinnot say a word till thou'st droonk it a'! Oop wi' it, mun! Ding, but I'm reeght glod to see thee!"

Adapting his action to his text, John dragged Nicholas into the kitchen, forced him down upon a huge settle beside a blazing fire, poured out from an enormous bottle about a quarter of a pint of spirits, thrust it into his hand, opened his mouth and threw back his head as a sign to him to drink it instantly, and stood with a broad grin of welcome overspreading his great red face like a jolly giant.

"I might ha' knowad," said John, "that nobody but thou would ha' coom wi' sike a knock as yon. Thot was the wa' thou knocked at schoolmeasther's door, eh? Ha, ha, ha! But I say—wa'at be a' this aboot schoolmeasther?"

"You know it, then?" said Nicholas.

"They were talking aboot it, doon toon, last neeght," replied John, "but neane on 'em seemed quite to un'erstan' it loike."

"After various shiftings and delays," said Nicholas, "he has been sentenced to be transported for seven years, for being in the unlawful possession of a stolen will; and, after that, he has to suffer the consequence of a conspiracy."

"Whew!" cried John, "a conspiracy! Soom'at in the pooder-plot wa'—eh? Soom'at in the Guy Faurx line?"

"No, no, no, a conspiracy connected with his school; I'll explain it presently."

"Thot's reeght!" said John, "explain it arter breakfast, not noo, for thou be'est hoongry, and so am I; and Tilly she mun' be at the bottom o' a' explanations, for she says thot's the mutual confidence. Ha, ha, ha! Ecod, it's a room start, is the mutual confidence!"

The entrance of Mrs. Browdie, with a smart cap on, and very many apologies for their having been detected in the act of breakfasting in the kitchen, stopped John in his discussion of this grave subject, and hastened the breakfast: which, being composed of vast mounds of toast, new-laid eggs, boiled ham, Yorkshire pie, and other cold substantials (of which heavy relays were constantly appearing from another kitchen under the direction of a very plump servant), was admirably adapted to the cold bleak morning, and received the utmost justice from all

parties. At last it came to a close; and the fire which had been lighted in the best parlour having by this time burnt up, they adjourned thither to hear what Nicholas had to tell.

Nicholas told them all, and never was there a story which awakened so many emotions in the breasts of two eager listeners. At one time honest John groaned in sympathy, and at another roared with joy; at one time he vowed to go up to London on purpose to get a sight of the brothers Cheeryble; and, at another, swore that Tim Linkinwater should receive such a ham by coach, and carriage free, as mortal knife had never carved. When Nicholas began to describe Madeline, he sat with his mouth wide open, nudging Mrs. Browdie from time to time, and exclaiming under his breath that she must be "raather a tidy sart;" and when he heard, at last, that his young friend had come down purposely to communicate his good fortune, and to convey to him all those assurances of friendship which he could not state with sufficient warmth in writing—that the only object of his journey was to share his happiness with them, and to tell them that when he was married they must come up to see him, and that Madeline insisted on it as well as he—John could hold out no longer, but, after looking indignantly at his wife, and demanding to know what she was whimpering for, drew his coat-sleeve over his eyes, and blubbered outright.

"Tell 'ee wa'at, though," said John seriously, when a great deal had been said on both sides, "to return to schoolmeasther. If this news aboot 'un has reached school to-day, the old 'ooman wean't have a whole boan in her boddy, nor Fanny neither."

"Oh, John!" cried Mrs. Browdie.

"Ah! and Oh, John, agean," replied the Yorkshireman. "I dinnot know what they lads mightn't do. When it first got aboot that schoolmeasther was in trouble, some feythers and moothers sent and took their young chaps awa'. If them as is left should know wa'at's coom tiv'un, there'll be sike a revolution and rebel! —Ding! But I think they'll a' gang daft, and spill bluid like wather!"

In fact, John Browdie's apprehensions were so strong that he determined to ride over to the school without delay, and invited Nicholas to accompany him, which, however, he declined, pleading that his presence might perhaps aggravate the bitterness of their adversity.

"Thot's true!" said John; "I should ne'er ha' thought o' thot."

"I must return to morrow," said Nicholas, "but I mean to dine with you to-day, and, if Mrs. Browdie can give me a bed——"

"Bed!" cried John, "I wish thou couldst sleep in fower beds at once. Ecod, thou shouldst have 'em a'. Bide till I coom back, on'y bide till I coom back, and ecod we'll make a day of it."

Giving his wife a hearty kiss, and Nicholas a no less hearty shake of the hand, John mounted his horse and rode off: leaving Mrs. Browdie to apply herself to hospitable preparations, and his young friend to stroll about the neighbourhood, and revisit spots which were rendered familiar to him by many a miserable association.

John cantered away, and, arriving at Dotheboys Hall, tied his horse to a gate, and made his way to the schoolroom door, which he found locked on the inside. A tremendous noise and riot arose from within, and, applying his eye to a convenient crevice in the wall, he did not remain long in ignorance of its meaning.

The news of Mr. Squeers's downfall had reached Dotheboys; that was quite clear. To all appearance, it had very recently become known to the young gentlemen; for the rebellion had just broken out.

It was one of the brimstone-and-treacle mornings, and Mrs. Squeers had entered school, according to custom, with the large bowl and spoon, followed by Miss Squeers and the amiable Wackford: who, during his father's absence, had taken upon him such minor branches of the executive as kicking the pupils with his nailed boots, pulling the hair of some of the smaller boys, pinching the others in aggravating places, and rendering himself, in various similar ways, a great comfort and happiness to his mother. Their entrance, whether by premeditation or a simultaneous impulse, was the signal of revolt. While one detachment rushed to the door and locked it, and another mounted on the desks and forms, the stoutest (and consequently the newest) boy seized the cane, and, confronting Mrs. Squeers with a stern countenance, snatched off her cap and beaver bonnet, put them on his own head, armed himself with the wooden spoon, and bade her, on pain of death, go down upon her knees and take a dose directly. Before that estimable lady could recover herself, or offer the slightest retaliation, she was forced into a kneeling posture by a crowd of shouting tormentors, and compelled to swallow a spoonful of the odious mixture, rendered more than usually savoury by the immersion in the bowl of Master Wackford's head, whose ducking was intrusted to another rebel. The success of this first achievement prompted

the malicious crowd, whose faces were clustered together in every variety of lank and half-starved ugliness, to further acts of outrage. The leader was insisting upon Mrs. Squeers repeating her dose, Master Squeers was undergoing another dip in the treacle, and a violent assault had been commenced on Miss Squeers, when John Browdie, bursting open the door with a vigorous kick, rushed to the rescue. The shouts, screams, groans, hoots, and clapping of hands suddenly ceased, and a dead silence ensued.

"Ye be noice chaps," said John, looking steadily round. "Wa'at's to do here, thou yoong dogs?"

"Squeers is in prison, and we are going to run away!" cried a score of shrill voices. "We won't stop, we won't stop!"

"Weel, then, dinnot stop," replied John. "Who waants thee to stop? Roon awa' loike men, but dinnot hurt the women."

"Hurrah!" cried the shrill voices, more shrilly still.

"Hurrah!" repeated John. "Weel, hurrah loike men too. Noo then, look out. Hip—hip—hip—hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" cried the voices.

"Hurrah! Agean," said John. "Looder still."

The boys obeyed.

"Anoother!" said John. "Dinnot be afeard on it. Let's have a good 'un!"

"Hurrah!"

"Noo then," said John, "let's have yan more to end wi', and then coot off as quick as you loike. Tak' a good breath noo—Squeers be in gaol—the school's brokken oop—it's a' ower—past and gane—think o' thot, and let it be a hearty 'un! Hurrah!"

Such a cheer arose as the walls of Dotheboys Hall had never echoed before, and were destined never to respond to again. When the sound had died away the school was empty; and, of the busy noisy crowd which had peopled it but five minutes before, not one remained.

"Very well, Mr. Browdie!" said Miss Squeers, hot and flushed from the recent encounter, but vixenish to the last; "you've been and excited our boys to run away. Now, see if we don't pay you out for that, sir! If my pa *is* unfortunate and trod down by henemies, we're not going to be basely crowed and conquered over by you and 'Tilda."

"Noa!" replied John bluntly, "thou bean't. Tak' thy oath o' thot. Think betther o' us, Fanny. I tell 'ee both that I'm glod the auld man has been caught out at last—dom'd glod—but ye'll sooffer eneaf wi'out any crowin' fra' me, and I be not the mun to crow, nor be Tilly the lass, so I tell 'ee flat. More than thot, I tell 'ee noo, that if thou need'st friends to help thee awa' from this place—dinnot turn up thy nose, Fanny, thou may'st—thou'lt foind Tilly and I wi' a thout o' old times aboot us, ready to lend thee a hond. And, when I say thot, dinnot think I be asheamed of wa'at I've deane, for I say agean, Hurrah! and dom the schoolmeasther—there!"

His parting words concluded, John Browdie strode heavily out, remounted his nag, put him once more into a smart canter, and, carolling lustily forth some fragments of an old song, to which the horse's hoofs rang a merry accompaniment, sped back to his pretty wife and to Nicholas.

For some days afterwards the neighbouring country was overrun with boys, who, the report went, had been secretly furnished by Mr. and Mrs. Browdie, not only with a hearty meal of bread and meat, but with sundry shillings and sixpences to help them on their way. To this rumour John always returned a stout denial, which he accompanied, however, with a lurking grin, that rendered the suspicious doubtful, and fully confirmed all previous believers.

There were a few timid young children who, miserable as they had been, and many as were the tears they had shed in the wretched school, still knew no other home, and had formed for it a sort of attachment, which made them weep when the bolder spirits fled, and cling to it as a refuge. Of these, some were found crying under hedges and in such places, frightened at the solitude. One had a dead bird in a little cage; he had wandered nearly twenty miles, and, when his poor favourite died, lost courage, and lay down beside him. Another was discovered in a yard hard by the school, sleeping with a dog, who bit at those who came to remove him, and licked the sleeping child's pale face.

They were taken back, and some other stragglers were recovered, but by degrees they were claimed, or lost again; and, in course of time, Dotheboys Hall and its last breaking-up began to be forgotten by the neighbours, or to be only spoken of as among the things that had been.

CHAPTER LXV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN her term of mourning had expired, Madeline gave her hand and fortune to Nicholas; and, on the same day and at the same time, Kate became Mrs. Frank Cheeryble. It was expected that Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy would have made a third couple on the occasion, but they declined, and two or three weeks afterwards went out together one morning before breakfast, and, coming back with merry faces, were found to have been quietly married that day.

The money which Nicholas acquired in right of his wife he invested in the firm of Cheeryble Brothers, in which Frank had become a partner. Before many years elapsed, the business began to be carried on in the names of "Cheeryble and Nickleby," so that Mrs. Nickleby's prophetic anticipations were realised at last.

The twin brothers retired. Who needs to be told that *they* were happy? They were surrounded by happiness of their own creation, and lived but to increase it.

Tim Linkinwater condescended, after much entreaty and browbeating, to accept a share in the house; but he could never be prevailed upon to suffer the publication of his name as a partner, and always persisted in the punctual and regular discharge of his clerkly duties.

He and his wife lived in the old house, and occupied the very bedchamber in which he had slept for four-and-forty years. As his wife grew older, she became even a more cheerful and light-hearted little creature; and it was a common saying among their friends, that it was impossible to say which looked the happier—Tim as he sat calmly smiling in his elbow-chair on one side of the fire, or his brisk little wife chatting and laughing, and constantly bustling in and out of hers, on the other.

Dick, the blackbird, was removed from the counting-house, and promoted to a warm corner in the common sitting-room. Beneath his cage hung two miniatures of Mrs. Linkinwater's execution; one representing herself, and the other Tim; and both smiling very hard at all beholders. Tim's head being powdered like a twelfth-cake, and his spectacles copied with great nicety, strangers detected a close resemblance to him at the first glance, and this leading them to suspect that the other must be his wife, and emboldening them to say so without scruple, Mrs. Linkinwater grew very proud of these achievements in time, and considered them among the most successful likenesses she had ever painted. Tim had the profoundest faith in them likewise; for on this, as on all other subjects, they held but one opinion; and, if ever there were a "comfortable couple" in the world, it was Mr. and Mrs. Linkinwater.

Ralph, having died intestate, and having no relations but those with whom he had lived in such enmity, they would have become in legal course his heirs. But they could not bear the thought of growing rich on money so acquired, and felt as though they could never hope to prosper with it. They made no claim to his wealth; and the riches for which he had toiled all his days, and burdened his soul with so many evil deeds, were swept at last into the coffers of the state, and no man was the better or the happier for them.

Arthur Gride was tried for the unlawful possession of the will, which he had either procured to be stolen, or had dishonestly acquired and retained by other means as bad. By dint of an ingenious counsel and a legal flaw, he escaped; but only to undergo a worse punishment; for, some years afterwards, his house was broken open in the night by robbers, tempted by the rumours of his great wealth, and he was found murdered in his bed.

Mrs. Sliderskew went beyond the seas at nearly the same time as Mr. Squeers, and, in the course of nature, never returned. Brooker died penitent. Sir Mulberry Hawk lived abroad for some years, courted and caressed, and in high repute as a fine dashing fellow. Ultimately, returning to this country, he was thrown into gaol for debt, and there perished miserably, as such high spirits generally do.

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed.

Within a stone's throw was another retreat, enlivened by children's pleasant voices too; and here was Kate, with many new cares and occupations, and many new faces courting her sweet smile (and one so like her own, that to her mother she seemed a child again), the same true gentle creature, the same fond sister, the same in the love of all about her, as in her girlish days.

Mrs. Nickleby lived, sometimes with her daughter, and sometimes with her son, accompanying one or other of them to London at those periods when the cares of business obliged both families to reside there, and always preserving a great appearance of dignity, and relating her experiences (especially on points connected with the management and bringing-up of children) with much solemnity and importance. It was a very long time before she could be induced to receive Mrs. Linkinwater into favour, and it is even doubtful whether she ever thoroughly forgave her.

There was one grey-haired, quiet, harmless gentleman, who, winter and summer, lived in a little cottage hard by Nicholas's house, and, when he was not there, assumed the superintendence of affairs. His chief pleasure and delight was in the children, with whom he was a child himself, and master of the revels. The little people could do nothing without dear Newman Noggs.

The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summer time, garlands of fresh flowers, wreathed by infant hands, rested on the stone; and, when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin.

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"AS THE COACH STOPS, A GENTLEMAN IN A STRAW HAT LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW."—P. 91

AMERICAN NOTES

AND

PICTURES FROM ITALY

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH EIGHTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. B. FROST AND GORDON THOMSON

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193 PICCADILLY

PREFACE.

MY readers have opportunities of judging for themselves whether the influences and tendencies which I distrusted in America had, at that time, any existence but in my imagination. They can examine for themselves whether there has been anything in the public career of that country since, at home or abroad, which suggests that those influences and tendencies really did exist. As they find the fact, they will judge me. If they discern any evidences of wrong-going, in any direction that I have indicated, they will acknowledge that I had reason in what I wrote. If they discern no such indications, they will consider me altogether mistaken—but not wilfully.

Prejudiced I am not, and never have been, otherwise than in favour of the United States. I have many friends in America, I feel a grateful interest in the country, I hope and believe it will successfully work out a problem of the highest importance to the whole human race. To represent me as viewing AMERICA with ill-nature, coldness, or animosity, is merely to do a very foolish thing, which is always a very easy one.

CONTENTS.

AMERICAN NOTES.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Going Away	1
II.	The Passage Out	5
III.	Boston	12
IV.	An American Railroad. Lowell and its Factory System	29
V.	Worcester. The Connecticut River. Hartford. New Haven to New York	34
VI.	New York	38
VII.	Philadelphia, and its Solitary Prison	46
VIII.	Washington. The Legislature. And the President's House	53
IX.	A Night Steamer on the Potomac River. Virginia Road and a Black Driver. Richmond. Baltimore. The Harrisburg Mail, and a Glimpse of the City. A Canal Boat	61
X.	Some further Account of the Canal Boat, its Domestic Economy, and its Passengers. Journey to Pittsburg across the Alleghany Mountains. Pittsburg	69
XI.	From Pittsburg to Cincinnati in a Western Steamboat. Cincinnati	75
XII.	From Cincinnati to Louisville in another Western Steamboat; and from Louisville to St. Louis in another. St. Louis.	79
XIII.	A Jaunt to the Looking-glass Prairie and Back	84
XIV.	Return to Cincinnati. A Stage-coach Ride from that City to Columbus, and thence to Sandusky. So, by Lake Erie, to the Falls of Niagara	89
XV.	In Canada: Toronto; Kingston; Montreal; Quebec; St. John's. In the United States again: Lebanon; the Shaker Village; and West Point	96
XVI.	The Passage Home	105
XVII.	Slavery	109
XVIII.	Concluding Remarks	116
	POSTSCRIPT	120

PICTURES FROM ITALY.

	PAGE
The Reader's Passport	125
Going through France	126
Lyons, the Rhone, and the Goblin of Avignon	130
Avignon to Genoa	134
Genoa and its Neighbourhood	136
To Parma, Modena, and Bologna	151
Through Bologna and Ferrara	156
An Italian Dream	158
By Verona, Mantua, and Milan, across the Pass of the Simplon into Switzerland	163
To Rome by Pisa and Siena	170
Rome	176
A Rapid Diorama—	
To Naples	197
Naples	199
Pompeii—Herculaneum	201
Pæstum	202
Vesuvius	203
Return to Naples	205
Monte Cassino	207
Florence	208

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

"As the coach stops, a gentleman in a straw hat looks out of the window" (American Notes) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

An Incident in the Carnival (Pictures from Italy) . . . . . *To face page* 180

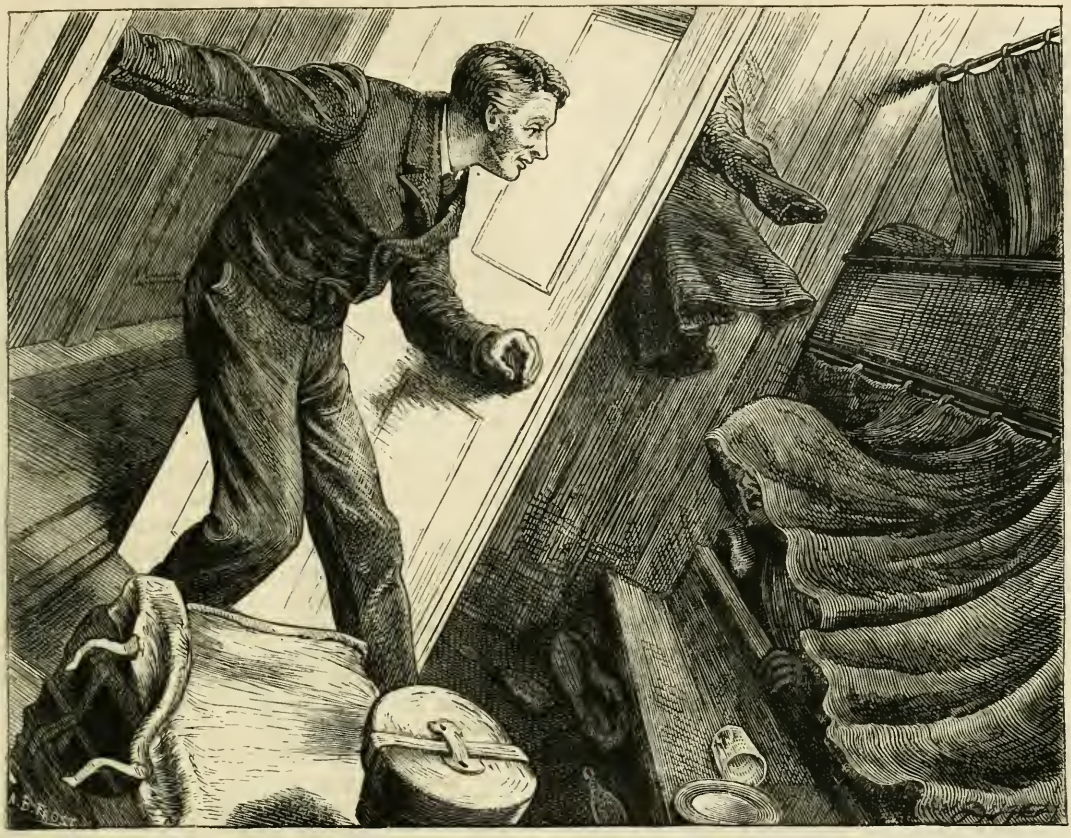
ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT.

AMERICAN NOTES.

	PAGE		PAGE
Vignette.		In the White House	60
"Rather a heavy sea on, sir, and a head wind" .	1	In the Cabin of the Canal Boat	72
Railway Dialogue	32	Emigrants	77
"When suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue"	44	"Not yet awhile, sir, not yet"	88
		"And having his wet pipe presented to him," &c.	100

PICTURES FROM ITALY.

	PAGE		PAGE
The Malle Poste	125	Artists' Models	184
Playing at Mora	140	Priests and Monks	200
The Church and the World	153	Tail-piece	210
An Italian Dream	160		



AMERICAN NOTES.

CHAPTER I.

GOING AWAY.

I SHALL never forget the one-fourth serious and three-fourths comical astonishment with which, on the morning of the third of January, eighteen-hundred-and-forty-two, I opened the door of, and put my head into, a "state-room" on board the Britannia steam-packet, twelve hundred tons burden per register, bound for Halifax and Boston, and carrying her Majesty's mails.

That this state-room had been specially engaged for "Charles Dickens. Esquire, and Lady," was rendered sufficiently clear even to my scared intellect by a very small manuscript, announcing the fact, which was pinned on a very flat quilt, covering a very thin mattress, spread like a surgical plaster on a most inaccessible shelf. But that this was the state-room concerning which Charles Dickens, Esquire, and Lady, had held daily and nightly conferences for at least four months preceding: that this could by any possibility be that small snug chamber of the imagination, which Charles Dickens, Esquire, with the spirit of prophecy strong upon him, had always foretold would contain at least one little sofa, and which his lady, with a modest yet most magnificent sense of its limited dimensions, had from the first opined would not hold more than two enormous portmanteaus in some odd corner out of sight (portmanteaus which could now no more be got in at the door, not to say stowed away, than a

giraffe could be persuaded or forced into a flower-pot): that this utterly impracticable, thoroughly hopeless, and profoundly preposterous box had the remotest reference to, or connection with, those chaste and pretty, not to say gorgeous little bowers, sketched by a masterly hand, in the highly varnished lithographic plan hanging up in the agent's counting-house in the city of London: that this room of state, in short, could be anything but a pleasant fiction and cheerful jest of the captain's, invented and put in practice for the better relish and enjoyment of the real state-room presently to be disclosed:—these were truths which I really could not, for the moment, bring my mind at all to bear upon or comprehend. And I sat down upon a kind of horsehair slab, or perch, of which there were two within; and looked, without any expression of countenance whatever, at some friends who had come on board with us, and who were crushing their faces into all manner of shapes by endeavouring to squeeze them through the small doorway.

We had experienced a pretty smart shock before coming below, which, but that we were the most sanguine people living, might have prepared us for the worst. The imaginative artist to whom I have already made allusion has depicted, in the same great work, a chamber of almost interminable perspective, furnished, as Mr. Robins would say, in a style of more than Eastern splendour, and filled (but not inconveniently so) with groups of ladies and gentlemen, in the very highest state of enjoyment and vivacity. Before descending into the bowels of the ship, we had passed from the deck into a long narrow apartment, not unlike a gigantic hearse with windows in the sides; having at the upper end a melancholy stove, at which three or four chilly stewards were warming their hands; while on either side, extending down its whole dreary length, was a long, long table, over each of which a rack, fixed to the low roof, and stuck full of drinking-glasses and cruet-stands, hinted dismally at rolling seas and heavy weather. I had not at that time seen the ideal presentment of this chamber which has since gratified me so much, but I observed that one of our friends, who had made the arrangements for our voyage, turned pale on entering, retreated on the friend behind him, smote his forehead involuntarily, and said below his breath, "Impossible! it cannot be!" or words to that effect. He recovered himself, however, by a great effort, and, after a preparatory cough or two, cried, with a ghastly smile which is still before me, looking at the same time round the walls, "Ha! the breakfast-room, steward, eh?" We all foresaw what the answer must be: we knew the agony he suffered. He had often spoken of *the saloon;* had taken in and lived upon the pictorial idea; had usually given us to understand, at home, that to form a just conception of it, it would be necessary to multiply the size and furniture of an ordinary drawing-room by seven, and then fall short of the reality. When the man in reply avowed the truth: the blunt, remorseless, naked truth: "This is the saloon, sir"—he actually reeled beneath the blow.

In persons who were so soon to part, and interpose between their else daily communication the formidable barrier of many thousand miles of stormy space, and who were for that reason anxious to cast no other cloud, not even the passing shadow of a moment's disappointment or discomfiture, upon the short interval of happy companionship that yet remained to them—in persons so situated, the natural transition from these first surprises was obviously into peals of hearty laughter; and I can report that I, for one, being still seated upon the slab or perch before mentioned, roared outright until the vessel rang again. Thus, in less than two minutes after coming upon it for the first time, we all by common consent agreed that this state-room was the pleasantest and most facetious and capital contrivance possible, and that to have had it one inch larger would have been quite a disagreeable and deplorable state of things. And with this; and with showing how—by very nearly closing the door, and twining in and out like serpents, and by counting the little washing slab as standing-room—we could manage to insinuate four people into it, all at one time; and entreating each other to observe how very airy it was (in dock), and how there was a beautiful port-hole which could be kept open all day (weather permitting), and how there was quite a large bull's-eye just over the looking-glass, which would render shaving a perfectly easy and delightful process (when the ship didn't roll too much); we arrived, at last, at the unanimous conclusion that it was rather spacious than otherwise: though I do verily believe that, deducting the two berths, one above the other, than which nothing smaller for sleeping in was ever made except coffins, it was no bigger than one of those hackney cabriolets which have the door behind, and shoot their fares out like sacks of coals upon the pavement.

Having settled this point to the perfect satisfaction of all parties, concerned or unconcerned, we sat down round the fire in the ladies' cabin—just to try the effect. It was rather dark, cer-

tainly; but somebody said, "Of course it would be light at sea," a proposition to which we all assented; echoing "Of course, of course;" though it would be exceedingly difficult to say why we thought so. I remember, too, when we had discovered and exhausted another topic of consolation in the circumstance of this ladies' cabin adjoining our state-room, and the consequently immense feasibility of sitting there at all times and seasons, and had fallen into a momentary silence, leaning our faces on our hands and looking at the fire, one of our party said, with the solemn air of a man who had made a discovery, "What a relish mulled claret will have down here!" which appeared to strike us all most forcibly; as though there were something spicy and high-flavoured in cabins, which essentially improved that composition, and rendered it quite incapable of perfection anywhere else.

There was a stewardess, too, actively engaged in producing clean sheets and table-cloths from the very entrails of the sofas, and from unexpected lockers, of such artful mechanism that it made one's head ache to see them opened one after another, and rendered it quite a distracting circumstance to follow her proceedings, and to find that every nook and corner and individual piece of furniture was something else besides what it pretended to be, and was a mere trap and deception and place of secret stowage, whose ostensible purpose was its least useful one.

God bless that stewardess for her piously fraudulent account of January voyages! God bless her for her clear recollection of the companion passage of last year, when nobody was ill, and everybody danced from morning till night, and it was "a run" of twelve days, and a piece of the purest frolic, and delight, and jollity! All happiness be with her for her bright face and her pleasant Scotch tongue, which had sounds of old Home in it for my fellow-traveller; and for her predictions of fair winds and fine weather (all wrong, or I shouldn't be half so fond of her); and for the ten thousand small fragments of genuine womanly tact by which, without piecing them elaborately together, and patching them up into shape and form and case and pointed application, she nevertheless did plainly show that all young mothers on one side of the Atlantic were near and close at hand to their little children left upon the other; and that what seemed to the uninitiated a serious journey, was, to those who were in the secret, a mere frolic, to be sung about and whistled at! Light be her heart, and gay her merry eyes, for years!

The state-room had grown pretty fast; but by this time it had expanded into something quite bulky, and almost boasted a bay-window to view the sea from. So we went upon deck again in high spirits; and there everything was in such a state of bustle and active preparation, that the blood quickened its pace, and whirled through one's veins on that clear frosty morning with involuntary mirthfulness. For every gallant ship was riding slowly up and down, and every little boat was plashing noisily in the water; and knots of people stood upon the wharf, gazing with a kind of "dread delight" on the far-famed fast American steamer; and one party of men were "taking in the milk," or, in other words, getting the cow on board; and another were filling the ice-houses to the very throat with fresh provisions; with butcher's meat and garden stuff, pale sucking-pigs, calves' heads in scores, beef, veal, and pork, and poultry out of all proportion; and others were coiling ropes, and busy with oakum yarns; and others were lowering heavy packages into the hold; and the purser's head was barely visible as it loomed in a state of exquisite perplexity from the midst of a vast pile of passengers' luggage; and there seemed to be nothing going on anywhere, or uppermost in the mind of anybody, but preparations for this mighty voyage. This, with the bright cold sun, the bracing air, the crisply-curling water, the thin white crust of morning ice upon the decks which crackled with a sharp and cheerful sound beneath the lightest tread, was irresistible. And when, again upon the shore, we turned and saw from the vessel's mast her name signalled in flags of joyous colours, and fluttering by their side the beautiful American banner with its stars and stripes—the long three thousand miles and more, and, longer still, the six whole months of absence, so dwindled and faded that the ship had gone out and come home again, and it was broad spring already in the Coburg Dock at Liverpool.

I have not inquired among my medical acquaintance whether Turtle, and cold Punch, with Hock, Champagne, and Claret, and all the slight et cætera usually included in an unlimited order for a good dinner—especially when it is left to the liberal construction of my faultless friend, Mr. Radley of the Adelphi Hotel—are peculiarly calculated to suffer a sea-change; or whether a plain mutton chop, and a glass or two of sherry, would be less likely of conversion into foreign and disconcerting material. My own opinion is, that whether one is discreet or indiscreet in these particulars, on the eve of a sea voyage, is a matter of little consequence; and that, to use a common phrase, "it comes to

very much the same thing in the end." Be this as it may, I know that the dinner of that day was undeniably perfect; that it comprehended all these items, and a great many more; and that we all did ample justice to it. And I know, too, that, bating a certain tacit avoidance of any allusion to to-morrow; such as may be supposed to prevail between delicate-minded turnkeys and a sensitive prisoner who is to be hanged next morning; we got on very well, and, all things considered, were merry enough.

When the morning—*the* morning—came, and we met at breakfast, it was curious to see how eager we all were to prevent a moment's pause in the conversation, and how astoundingly gay everybody was: the forced spirits of each member of the little party having as much likeness to his natural mirth, as hothouse peas at five guineas the quart resemble in flavour the growth of the dews, and air, and rain of Heaven. But as one o'clock, the hour for going aboard, drew near, this volubility dwindled away by little and little, despite the most persevering efforts to the contrary, until at last, the matter being now quite desperate, we threw off all disguise; openly speculated upon where we should be this time to-morrow, this time next day, and so forth; and intrusted a vast number of messages to those who intended returning to town that night, which were to be delivered at home and elsewhere, without fail, within the very shortest possible space of time after the arrival of the railway train at Euston Square. And commissions and remembrances do so crowd upon one at such a time, that we were still busied with this employment when we found ourselves fused, as it were, into a dense conglomeration of passengers and passengers' friends and passengers' luggage, all jumbled together on the deck of a small steamboat, and panting and snorting off to the packet, which had worked out of dock yesterday afternoon, and was now lying at her moorings in the river.

And there she is! all eyes are turned to where she lies, dimly discernible through the gathering fog of the early winter afternoon; every finger is pointed in the same direction; and murmurs of interest and admiration—as "How beautiful she looks!" "How trim she is!"—are heard on every side. Even the lazy gentleman with his hat on one side and his hands in his pockets, who has dispensed so much consolation by inquiring with a yawn of another gentleman whether he is "going across"—as if it were a ferry—even he condescends to look that way, and nod his head, as who should say, "No mistake about *that:*" and not even the sage Lord Burleigh in his nod included half so much as this lazy gentleman of might who has made the passage (as everybody on board has found out already; it's impossible to say how) thirteen times without a single accident! There is another passenger very much wrapped up, who has been frowned down by the rest, and morally trampled upon and crushed, for presuming to inquire with a timid interest how long it is since the poor President went down. He is standing close to the lazy gentleman, and says with a faint smile that he believes She is a very strong Ship; to which the lazy gentleman, looking first in his questioner's eye and then very hard in the wind's, answers unexpectedly and ominously, that She need be. Upon this the lazy gentleman instantly falls very low in the popular estimation, and the passengers, with looks of defiance, whisper to each other that he is an ass and an impostor, and clearly don't know anything at all about it.

But we are made fast alongside the packet, whose huge red funnel is smoking bravely, giving rich promise of serious intentions. Packing-cases, portmanteaus, carpet bags, and boxes are already passed from hand to hand, and hauled on board with breathless rapidity. The officers, smartly dressed, are at the gangway, handing the passengers up the side, and hurrying the men. In five minutes' time the little steamer is utterly deserted, and the packet is beset and overrun by its late freight, who instantly pervade the whole ship, and are to be met with by the dozen in every nook and corner: swarming down below with their own baggage, and stumbling over other people's; disposing themselves comfortably in wrong cabins, and creating a most horrible confusion by having to turn out again; madly bent upon opening locked doors, and on forcing a passage into all kinds of out-of-the-way places where there is no thoroughfare; sending wild stewards, with elfin hair, to and fro upon the breezy decks on unintelligible errands, impossible of execution; and, in short, creating the most extraordinary and bewildering tumult. In the midst of all this, the lazy gentleman, who seems to have no luggage of any kind—not so much as a friend even—lounges up and down the hurricane deck, coolly puffing a cigar; and, as this unconcerned demeanour again exalts him in the opinion of those who have leisure to observe his proceedings, every time he looks up at the masts, or down at the decks, or over the side, they look there too, as wondering whether he sees anything wrong anywhere, and hoping that, in case he should, he will have the goodness to mention it.

What have we here? The captain's boat! and yonder the captain himself. Now, by all our hopes and wishes, the very man he ought to be! A well-made, tight-built, dapper little fellow; with a ruddy face, which is a letter of invitation to shake him by both hands at once; and with a clear blue, honest eye, that it does one good to see one's sparkling image in. "Ring the bell!" "Ding, ding, ding!" the very bell is in a hurry. "Now for the shore—who's for the shore?"—"These gentlemen, I am sorry to say." They are away, and never said Good-bye. Ah! now they wave it from the little boat. "Good-bye! Good-bye!" Three cheers from them; three more from us; three more from them; and they are gone.

To and fro, to and fro, to and fro again a hundred times! This waiting for the latest mail-bags is worse than all. If we could have gone off in the midst of that last burst, we should have started triumphantly: but to lie here, two hours and more, in the damp fog, neither staying at home nor going abroad, is letting one gradually down into the very depths of dulness and low spirits. A speck in the mist, at last! That's something. It is the boat we wait for! That's more to the purpose. The captain appears on the paddle-box with his speaking trumpet; the officers take their stations; all hands are on the alert; the flagging hopes of the passengers revive; the cooks pause in their savoury work, and look out with faces full of interest. The boat comes alongside; the bags are dragged in anyhow, and flung down for the moment anywhere. Three cheers more: and, as the first one rings upon our ears, the vessel throbs like a strong giant that has just received the breath of life; the two great wheels turn fiercely round for the first time; and the noble ship, with wind and tide astern, breaks proudly through the lashed and foaming water.

CHAPTER II.

THE PASSAGE OUT.

WE all dined together that day; and a rather formidable party we were: no fewer than eighty-six strong. The vessel being pretty deep in the water, with all her coals on board and so many passengers, and the weather being calm and quiet, there was but little motion; so that before the dinner was half over, even those passengers who were most distrustful of themselves plucked up amazingly; and those who in the morning had returned to the universal question, "Are you a good sailor?" a very decided negative, now either parried the inquiry with the evasive reply, "Oh! I suppose I'm no worse than anybody else;" or, reckless of all moral obligations, answered boldly, "Yes:" and with some irritation too, as though they would add, "I should like to know what you see in *me*, sir, particularly, to justify suspicion!"

Notwithstanding this high tone of courage and confidence, I could not but observe that very few remained long over their wine; and that everybody had an unusual love of the open air; and that the favourite and most coveted seats were invariably those nearest to the door. The tea-table, too, was by no means as well attended as the dinner-table; and there was less whist-playing than might have been expected. Still, with the exception of one lady, who had retired with some precipitation at dinner-time, immediately after being assisted to the finest cut of a very yellow boiled leg of mutton with very green capers, there were no invalids as yet; and walking, and smoking, and drinking of brandy-and-water (but always in the open air), went on with unabated spirit until eleven o'clock, or thereabouts, when "turning in"—no sailor of seven hours' experience talks of going to bed—became the order of the night. The perpetual tramp of boot-heels on the decks gave place to a heavy silence, and the whole human freight was stowed away below, excepting a very few stragglers like myself, who were probably, like me, afraid to go there.

To one unaccustomed to such scenes, this is a very striking time on shipboard. Afterwards, and when its novelty had long worn off, it never ceased to have a peculiar interest and charm for me. The gloom through which the great black mass holds its direct and certain course; the rushing water, plainly heard, but dimly seen; the broad, white, glistening track that follows in the vessel's wake; the men on the look-out forward, who would be scarcely visible against the dark sky, but for their blotting out some score of glistening stars; the helmsman at the wheel, with the illuminated card before him, shining, a speck of light amidst the darkness, like something sentient and of Divine intelligence; the melancholy sighing of the wind through block, and rope, and chain; the gleaming forth of light from every crevice, nook, and tiny piece of glass about the decks, as though the ship were filled with fire in hiding, ready to burst through any outlet, wild with its resistless power of death

and ruin. At first, too, and even when the hour, and all the objects it exalts, have come to be familiar, it is difficult, alone and thoughtful, to hold them to their proper shapes and forms. They change with the wandering fancy; assume the semblance of things left far away; put on the well-remembered aspect of favourite places dearly loved; and even people them with shadows. Streets, houses, rooms; figures so like their usual occupants, that they have startled me by their reality, which far exceeded, as it seemed to me, all power of mine to conjure up the absent; have, many and many a time, at such an hour, grown suddenly out of objects with whose real look, and use, and purpose I was as well acquainted as with my own two hands.

My own two hands, and feet likewise, being very cold, however, on this particular occasion, I crept below at midnight. It was not exactly comfortable below. It was decidedly close; and it was impossible to be unconscious of the presence of that extraordinary compound of strange smells, which is to be found nowhere but on board ship, and which is such a subtle perfume that it seems to enter at every pore of the skin, and whisper of the hold. Two passengers' wives (one of them my own) lay already in silent agonies on the sofa; and one lady's maid (*my* lady's) was a mere bundle on the floor, execrating her destiny, and pounding her curl-papers among the stray boxes. Everything sloped the wrong way; which in itself was an aggravation scarcely to be borne. I had left the door open, a moment before, in the bosom of a gentle declivity, and, when I turned to shut it, it was on the summit of a lofty eminence. Now every plank and timber creaked, as if the ship were made of wicker-work; and now crackled like an enormous fire of the driest possible twigs. There was nothing for it but bed; so I went to bed.

It was pretty much the same for the next two days, with a tolerably fair wind and dry weather. I read in bed (but to this hour I don't know what) a good deal; and reeled on deck a little; drank cold brandy-and-water with an unspeakable disgust, and ate hard biscuit perseveringly: not ill, but going to be.

It is the third morning. I am awakened out of my sleep by a dismal shriek from my wife, who demands to know whether there's any danger. I rouse myself, and look out of bed. The water jug is plunging and leaping like a lively dolphin; all the smaller articles are afloat, except my shoes, which are stranded on a carpet bag, high and dry, like a couple of coal-barges. Suddenly I see them spring into the air, and behold the looking-glass, which is nailed to the wall, sticking fast upon the ceiling. At the same time the door entirely disappears, and a new one is opened in the floor. Then I begin to comprehend that the state-room is standing on its head.

Before it is possible to make any arrangement at all compatible with this novel state of things, the ship rights. Before one can say "Thank Heaven!" she wrongs again. Before one can cry she *is* wrong, she seems to have started forward, and to be a creature actively running of its own accord, with broken knees and failing legs, through every variety of hole and pitfall, and stumbling constantly. Before one can so much as wonder, she takes a high leap into the air. Before she has well done that, she takes a deep dive into the water. Before she has gained the surface, she throws a summerset. The instant she is on her legs, she rushes backward. And so she goes on staggering, heaving, wrestling, leaping, diving, jumping, pitching, throbbing, rolling, and rocking: and going through all these movements, sometimes by turns, and sometimes all together: until one feels disposed to roar for mercy.

A steward passes. "Steward!" "Sir?" "What *is* the matter? what *do* you call this?" "Rather a heavy sea on, sir, and a head wind."

A head wind! Imagine a human face upon the vessel's prow, with fifteen thousand Samsons in one bent upon driving her back, and hitting her exactly between the eyes whenever she attempts to advance an inch. Imagine the ship herself, with every pulse and artery of her huge body swollen and bursting under this maltreatment, sworn to go on or die. Imagine the wind howling, the sea roaring, the rain beating: all in furious array against her. Picture the sky both dark and wild, and the clouds in fearful sympathy with the waves, making another ocean in the air. Add to all this the clattering on deck and down below; the tread of hurried feet; the loud hoarse shouts of seamen; the gurgling in and out of water through the scuppers; with every now and then the striking of a heavy sea upon the planks above, with the deep, dead, heavy sound of thunder heard within a vault; and there is the head wind of that January morning.

I say nothing of what may be called the domestic noises of the ship: such as the breaking of glass and crockery, the tumbling down of stewards, the gambols, overhead, of loose casks and truant dozens of bottled porter, and the very remarkable and far from exhilarating sounds

raised in their various state-rooms by the seventy passengers who were too ill to get up to breakfast. I say nothing of them: for although I lay listening to this concert for three or four days, I don't think I heard it for more than a quarter of a minute, at the expiration of which term, I lay down again, excessively sea-sick.

Not sea-sick, be it understood, in the ordinary acceptation of the term: I wish I had been: but in a form which I have never seen or heard described, though I have no doubt it is very common. I lay there, all the day long, quite coolly and contentedly; with no sense of weariness, with no desire to get up, or get better, or take the air; with no curiosity, or care, or regret, of any sort or degree, saving that I think I can remember, in this universal indifference, having a kind of lazy joy—of fiendish delight, if anything so lethargic can be dignified with the title—in the fact of my wife being too ill to talk to me. If I may be allowed to illustrate my state of mind by such an example, I should say that I was exactly in the condition of the elder Mr. Willet, after the incursion of the rioters into his bar at Chigwell. Nothing would have surprised me. If, in the momentary illumination of any ray of intelligence that may have come upon me in the way of thoughts of Home, a goblin postman, with a scarlet coat and bell, had come into that little kennel before me, broad awake, in broad day, and, apologising for being damp through walking in the sea, had handed me a letter, directed to myself, in familiar characters, I am certain I should not have felt one atom of astonishment: I should have been perfectly satisfied. If Neptune himself had walked in, with a toasted shark on his trident, I should have looked upon the event as one of the very commonest every-day occurrences.

Once—once—I found myself on deck. I don't know how I got there, or what possessed me to go there, but there I was; and completely dressed too, with a huge pea-coat on, and a pair of boots such as no weak man in his senses could ever have got into. I found myself standing, when a gleam of consciousness came upon me, holding on to something. I don't know what. I think it was the boatswain: or it may have been the pump: or possibly the cow. I can't say how long I had been there; whether a day or a minute. I recollect trying to think about something (about anything in the whole wide world, I was not particular) without the smallest effect. I could not even make out which was the sea, and which the sky; for the horizon seemed drunk, and was flying wildly about in all directions. Even in that incapable state, however, I recognised the lazy gentleman standing before me: nautically clad in a suit of shaggy blue, with an oil-skin hat. But I was too imbecile, although I knew it to be he, to separate him from his dress; and tried to call him, I remember, *Pilot*. After another interval of total unconsciousness, I found he had gone, and recognised another figure in its place. It seemed to wave and fluctuate before me as though I saw it reflected in an unsteady looking-glass; but I knew it for the captain; and such was the cheerful influence of his face, that I tried to smile: yes, even then I tried to smile. I saw by his gestures that he addressed me; but it was a long time before I could make out that he remonstrated against my standing up to my knees in water—as I was; of course I don't know why. I tried to thank him, but couldn't. I could only point to my boots—or wherever I supposed my boots to be—and say in a plaintive voice, "Cork soles:" at the same time endeavouring, I am told, to sit down in the pool. Finding that I was quite insensible, and for the time a maniac, he humanely conducted me below.

There I remained until I got better: suffering, whenever I was recommended to eat anything, an amount of anguish only second to that which is said to be endured by the apparently drowned, in the process of restoration to life. One gentleman on board had a letter of introduction to me from a mutual friend in London. He sent it below with his card, on the morning of the head wind; and I was long troubled with the idea that he might be up, and well, and a hundred times a day expecting me to call upon him in the saloon. I imagined him one of those cast-iron images—I will not call them men—who ask, with red faces and lusty voices, what sea-sickness means, and whether it really is as bad as it is represented to be. This was very torturing indeed; and I don't think I ever felt such perfect gratification and gratitude of heart as I did when I heard from the ship's doctor that he had been obliged to put a large mustard poultice on this very gentleman's stomach. I date my recovery from the receipt of that intelligence.

It was materially assisted though, I have no doubt, by a heavy gale of wind, which came slowly up at sunset, when we were about ten days out, and raged with gradually increasing fury until morning, saving that it lulled for an hour a little before midnight. There was something in the unnatural repose of that hour, and in the after gathering of the storm, so incon-

ceivably awful and tremendous, that its bursting into full violence was almost a relief.

The labouring of the ship in the troubled sea on this night I shall never forget. "Will it ever be worse than this?" was a question I had often heard asked, when everything was sliding and bumping about, and when it certainly did seem difficult to comprehend the possibility of anything afloat being more disturbed, without toppling over and going down. But what the agitation of a steam-vessel is, on a bad winter's night in the wild Atlantic, it is impossible for the most vivid imagination to conceive. To say that she is flung down on her side in the waves, with her masts dipping into them, and that, springing up again, she rolls over on the other side, until a heavy sea strikes her with the noise of a hundred great guns, and hurls her back—that she stops, and staggers, and shivers, as though stunned, and then, with a violent throbbing at her heart, darts onward like a monster goaded into madness, to be beaten down, and battered, and crushed, and leaped on by the angry sea—that thunder, lightning, hail, and rain, and wind are all in fierce contention for the mastery—that every plank has its groan, every nail its shriek, and every drop of water in the great ocean its howling voice—is nothing. To say that all is grand, and all appalling and horrible in the last degree, is nothing. Words cannot express it. Thoughts cannot convey it. Only a dream can call it up again in all its fury, rage, and passion.

And yet, in the very midst of these terrors, I was placed in a situation so exquisitely ridiculous, that even then I had as strong a sense of its absurdity as I have now: and could no more help laughing than I can at any other comical incident, happening under circumstances the most favourable to its enjoyment. About midnight we shipped a sea, which forced its way through the sky-lights, burst open the doors above, and came raging and roaring down into the ladies' cabin, to the unspeakable consternation of my wife and a little Scotch lady—who, by the way, had previously sent a message to the captain by the stewardess, requesting him, with her compliments, to have a steel conductor immediately attached to the top of every mast, and to the chimney, in order that the ship might not be struck by lightning. They, and the handmaid before mentioned, being in such ecstasies of fear that I scarcely knew what to do with them, I naturally bethought myself of some restorative or comfortable cordial; and nothing better occurring to me, at the moment, than hot brandy-and-water, I procured a tumblerful without delay. It being impossible to stand or sit without holding on, they were all heaped together in one corner of a long sofa—a fixture, extending entirely across the cabin—where they clung to each other in momentary expectation of being drowned. When I approached this place with my specific, and was about to administer it, with many consolatory expressions, to the nearest sufferer, what was my dismay to see them all roll slowly down to the other end! And when I staggered to that end, and held out the glass once more, how immensely baffled were my good intentions by the ship giving another lurch, and their all rolling back again! I suppose I dodged them up and down this sofa for at least a quarter of an hour, without reaching them once; and, by the time I did catch them, the brandy-and-water was diminished, by constant spilling, to a tea-spoonful. To complete the group, it is necessary to recognise, in this disconcerted dodger, an individual very pale from sea-sickness, who had shaved his beard and brushed his hair last at Liverpool: and whose only articles of dress (linen not included) were a pair of dreadnought trousers; a blue jacket, formerly admired upon the Thames at Richmond; no stockings; and one slipper.

Of the outrageous antics performed by that ship next morning; which made bed a practical joke, and getting up, by any process short of falling out, an impossibility; I say nothing. But anything like the utter dreariness and desolation that met my eyes when I literally "tumbled up" on deck at noon, I never saw. Ocean and sky were all of one dull, heavy, uniform, lead colour. There was no extent of prospect even over the dreary waste that lay around us, for the sea ran high, and the horizon encompassed us like a large black hoop. Viewed from the air, or some tall bluff on shore, it would have been imposing and stupendous, no doubt; but seen from the wet and rolling decks, it only impressed one giddily and painfully. In the gale of last night the life-boat had been crushed by one blow of the sea like a walnut shell; and there it hung dangling in the air: a mere faggot of crazy boards. The planking of the paddle-boxes had been torn sheer away. The wheels were exposed and bare; and they whirled and dashed their spray about the decks at random. Chimney white with crusted salt; topmasts struck; storm-sails set; rigging all knotted, tangled, wet, and drooping: a gloomier picture it would be hard to look upon.

I was now comfortably established by courtesy in the ladies' cabin, where, besides ourselves, there were only four other passengers. First,

the little Scotch lady before mentioned, on her way to join her husband at New York, who had settled there three years before. Secondly and thirdly, an honest young Yorkshireman, connected with some American house; domiciled in that same city, and carrying thither his beautiful young wife, to whom he had been married but a fortnight, and who was the fairest specimen of a comely English country girl I have ever seen. Fourthly, fifthly, and lastly, another couple: newly married too, if one might judge from the endearments they frequently interchanged: of whom I know no more than that they were rather a mysterious, runaway kind of couple; that the lady had great personal attractions also; and that the gentleman carried more guns with him than Robinson Crusoe, wore a shooting coat, and had two great dogs on board. On further consideration, I remember that he tried hot roast pig and bottled ale as a cure for sea-sickness; and that he took these remedies (usually in bed) day after day, with astonishing perseverance. I may add, for the information of the curious, that they decidedly failed.

The weather continuing obstinately and almost unprecedentedly bad, we usually straggled into this cabin, more or less faint and miserable, about an hour before noon, and lay down on the sofas to recover; during which interval the captain would look in to communicate the state of the wind, the moral certainty of its changing to-morrow (the weather is always going to improve to-morrow, at sea), the vessel's rate of sailing, and so forth. Observations there were none to tell us of, for there was no sun to take them by. But a description of one day will serve for all the rest. Here it is.

The captain being gone, we compose ourselves to read, if the place be light enough; and if not, we doze and talk alternately. At one a bell rings, and the stewardess comes down with a steaming dish of baked potatoes, and another of roasted apples; and plates of pig's face, cold ham, salt beef; or perhaps a smoking mess of rare hot collops. We fall-to upon these dainties; eat as much as we can (we have great appetites now); and are as long as possible about it. If the fire will burn (it *will* sometimes), we are pretty cheerful. If it won't, we all remark to each other that it's very cold, rub our hands, cover ourselves with coats and cloaks, and lie down again to doze, talk, and read (provided as aforesaid), until dinner-time. At five another bell rings, and the stewardess reappears with another dish of potatoes—boiled this time—and store of hot meat of various kinds: not forgetting the roast pig, to be taken medicinally. We sit down at table again (rather more cheerfully than before); prolong the meal with a rather mouldy dessert of apples, grapes, and oranges; and drink our wine and brandy-and-water. The bottles and glasses are still upon the table, and the oranges and so forth are rolling about according to their fancy and the ship's way, when the doctor comes down, by special nightly invitation, to join our evening rubber: immediately on whose arrival we make a party at whist, and, as it is a rough night and the cards will not lie on the cloth, we put the tricks in our pockets as we take them. At whist we remain with exemplary gravity (deducting a short time for tea and toast) until eleven o'clock, or thereabouts; when the captain comes down again, in a sou'-wester hat tied under his chin, and a pilot coat: making the ground wet where he stands. By this time the card-playing is over, and the bottles and glasses are again upon the table; and after an hour's pleasant conversation about the ship, the passengers, and things in general, the captain (who never goes to bed, and is never out of humour) turns up his coat collar for the deck again; shakes hands all round; and goes laughing out into the weather as merrily as to a birthday party.

As to daily news, there is no dearth of that commodity. This passenger is reported to have lost fourteen pounds at Vingt-et-un in the saloon yesterday; and that passenger drinks his bottle of champagne every day, and how he does it (being only a clerk), nobody knows. The head engineer has distinctly said that there never was such times—meaning weather—and four good hands are ill, and have given in, dead beat. Several berths are full of water, and all the cabins are leaky. The ship's cook, secretly swigging damaged whiskey, has been found drunk; and has been played upon by the fire-engine until quite sober. All the stewards have fallen down-stairs at various dinner-times, and go about with plasters in various places. The baker is ill, and so is the pastrycook. A new man, horribly indisposed, has been required to fill the place of the latter officer; and has been propped and jammed up with empty casks in a little house upon deck, and commanded to roll out pie-crusts, which he protests (being highly bilious) it is death to him to look at. News! A dozen murders on shore would lack the interest of these slight incidents at sea.

Divided between our rubber and such topics as these, we were running (as we thought) into Halifax Harbour, on the fifteenth night, with little wind and a bright moon—indeed, we had made the Light at its outer entrance, and put

the pilot in charge—when suddenly the ship struck upon a bank of mud. An immediate rush on deck took place, of course; the sides were crowded in an instant; and for a few minutes we were in as lively a state of confusion as the greatest lover of disorder would desire to see. The passengers, and guns, and water casks, and other heavy matters, being all huddled together aft, however, to lighten her in the head, she was soon got off; and after some driving on towards an uncomfortable line of objects (whose vicinity had been announced very early in the disaster by a loud cry of "Breakers ahead!") and much backing of paddles, and heaving of the lead into a constantly decreasing depth of water, we dropped anchor in a strange outlandish-looking nook which nobody on board could recognise, although there was land all about us, and so close that we could plainly see the waving branches of the trees.

It was strange enough, in the silence of midnight, and the dead stillness that seemed to be created by the sudden and unexpected stoppage of the engine, which had been clanking and blasting in our ears incessantly for so many days, to watch the look of blank astonishment expressed in every face: beginning with the officers, tracing it through all the passengers, and descending to the very stokers and furnace-men, who emerged from below, one by one, and clustered together in a smoky group about the hatchway of the engine-room, comparing notes in whispers. After throwing up a few rockets and firing signal guns in the hope of being hailed from the land, or at least of seeing a light—but without any other sight or sound presenting itself—it was determined to send a boat on shore. It was amusing to observe how very kind some of the passengers were, in volunteering to go ashore in this same boat: for the general good, of course; not by any means because they thought the ship in an unsafe position, or contemplated the possibility of her heeling over in case the tide were running out. Nor was it less amusing to remark how desperately unpopular the poor pilot became in one short minute. He had had his passage out from Liverpool, and during the whole voyage had been quite a notorious character, as a teller of anecdotes and cracker of jokes. Yet here were the very men who had laughed the loudest at his jests, now flourishing their fists in his face, loading him with imprecations, and defying him to his teeth as a villain!

The boat soon shoved off, with a lantern and sundry blue lights on board; and in less than an hour returned; the officer in command bringing with him a tolerably tall young tree, which he had plucked up by the roots, to satisfy certain distrustful passengers whose minds misgave them that they were to be imposed upon and shipwrecked, and who would on no other terms believe that he had been ashore, or had done anything but fraudulently row a little way into the mist, specially to deceive them and compass their deaths. Our captain had foreseen from the first that we must be in a place called the Eastern passage; and so we were. It was about the last place in the world in which we had any business or reason to be, but a sudden fog, and some error on the pilot's part, were the cause. We were surrounded by banks, and rocks, and shoals of all kinds, but had happily drifted, it seemed, upon the only safe speck that was to be found thereabouts. Eased by this report, and by the assurance that the tide was past the ebb, we turned in at three o'clock in the morning.

I was dressing about half-past nine next day, when the noise above hurried me on deck. When I had left it overnight, it was dark, foggy, and damp, and there were bleak hills all round us. Now, we were gliding down a smooth, broad stream, at the rate of eleven miles an hour: our colours flying gaily; our crew rigged out in their smartest clothes; our officers in uniform again; the sun shining as on a brilliant April day in England; the land stretched out on either side, streaked with light patches of snow; white wooden houses; people at their doors; telegraphs working; flags hoisted; wharfs appearing; ships; quays crowded with people; distant noises; shouts; men and boys running down steep places towards the pier; all more bright and gay and fresh to our unused eyes than words can paint them. We came to a wharf, paved with uplifted faces; got alongside, and were made fast, after some shouting and straining of cables; darted, a score of us, along the gangway, almost as soon as it was thrust out to meet us, and before it had reached the ship—and leaped upon the firm glad earth again!

I suppose this Halifax would have appeared an Elysium, though it had been a curiosity of ugly dulness. But I carried away with me a most pleasant impression of the town and its inhabitants, and have preserved it to this hour. Nor was it without regret that I came home, without having found an opportunity of returning thither, and once more shaking hands with the friends I made that day.

It happened to be the opening of the Legislative Council and General Assembly, at which ceremonial the forms observed on the commencement of a new Session of Parliament in England were so closely copied, and so gravely presented

on a small scale, that it was like looking at Westminster through the wrong end of a telescope. The governor, as her Majesty's representative, delivered what may be called the Speech from the Throne. He said what he had to say manfully and well. The military band outside the building struck up "God save the Queen" with great vigour before his Excellency had quite finished; the people shouted; the ins rubbed their hands; the outs shook their heads; the Government party said there never was such a good speech; the opposition declared there never was such a bad one; the Speaker and members of the House of Assembly withdrew from the bar to say a great deal among themselves, and do a little; and, in short, everything went on, and promised to go on, just as it does at home upon the like occasions.

The town is built on the side of a hill, the highest point being commanded by a strong fortress, not yet quite finished. Several streets of good breadth and appearance extend from its summit to the water-side, and are intersected by cross-streets running parallel with the river. The houses are chiefly of wood. The market is abundantly supplied: and provisions are exceedingly cheap. The weather being unusually mild at that time for the season of the year, there was no sleighing: but there were plenty of those vehicles in yards and by-places, and some of them, from the gorgeous quality of their decorations, might have "gone on" without alteration as triumphal cars in a melodrama at Astley's. The day was uncommonly fine; the air bracing and healthful; the whole aspect of the town cheerful, thriving, and industrious.

We lay there seven hours, to deliver and exchange the mails. At length, having collected all our bags and all our passengers (including two or three choice spirits, who, having indulged too freely in oysters and champagne, were found lying insensible on their backs in unfrequented streets), the engines were again put in motion, and we stood off for Boston.

Encountering squally weather again in the Bay of Fundy, we tumbled and rolled about as usual all that night and all next day. On the next afternoon—that is to say, on Saturday, the twenty-second of January—an American pilot-boat came alongside, and soon afterwards the Britannia steam-packet from Liverpool, eighteen days out, was telegraphed at Boston.

The indescribable interest with which I strained my eyes, as the first patches of American soil peeped like molehills from the green sea, and followed them, as they swelled, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, into a continuous line of coast, can hardly be exaggerated. A sharp keen wind blew dead against us; a hard frost prevailed on shore; and the cold was most severe. Yet the air was so intensely clear, and dry, and bright, that the temperature was not only endurable, but delicious.

How I remained on deck, staring about me, until we came alongside the dock, and how, though I had had as many eyes as Argus, I should have had them all wide open, and all employed on new objects—are topics which I will not prolong this chapter to discuss. Neither will I more than hint at my foreigner-like mistake, in supposing that a party of most active persons, who scrambled on board at the peril of their lives as we approached the wharf, were newsmen, answering to that industrious class at home; whereas, despite the leathern wallets of news slung about the necks of some, and the broadsheets in the hands of all, they were Editors, who boarded ships in person (as one gentleman in a worsted comforter informed me), "because they liked the excitement of it." Suffice it in this place to say, that one of these invaders, with a ready courtesy for which I thank him here most gratefully, went on before to order rooms at the hotel; and that when I followed, as I soon did, I found myself rolling through the long passages with an involuntary imitation of the gait of Mr. T. P. Cooke, in a new nautical melodrama.

"Dinner, if you please," said I to the waiter.

"When?" said the waiter.

"As quick as possible," said I.

"Right away?" said the waiter.

After a moment's hesitation, I answered, "No," at hazard.

"*Not* right away?" cried the waiter, with an amount of surprise that made me start.

I looked at him doubtfully, and returned, "No; I would rather have it in this private room. I like it very much."

At this I really thought the waiter must have gone out of his mind; as I believe he would have done, but for the interposition of another man, who whispered in his ear, "Directly."

"Well! and that's a fact!" said the waiter, looking helplessly at me. "Right away."

I saw now that "Right away" and "Directly" were one and the same thing. So I reversed my previous answer, and sat down to dinner in ten minutes afterwards; and a capital dinner it was.

The hotel (a very excellent one) is called the Tremont House. It has more galleries, colonnades, piazzas, and passages than I can remember, or the reader would believe.

CHAPTER III.

BOSTON.

IN all the public establishments of America the utmost courtesy prevails. Most of our Departments are susceptible of considerable improvement in this respect, but the Custom House, above all others, would do well to take example from the United States, and render itself somewhat less odious and offensive to foreigners. The servile rapacity of the French officials is sufficiently contemptible; but there is a surly, boorish incivility about our men, alike disgusting to all persons who fall into their hands, and discreditable to the nation that keeps such ill-conditioned curs snarling about its gates.

When I landed in America, I could not help being strongly impressed with the contrast their Custom House presented, and the attention, politeness, and good-humour with which its officers discharged their duty.

As we did not land at Boston, in consequence of some detention at the wharf, until after dark, I received my first impressions of the city in walking down to the Custom House on the morning after our arrival, which was Sunday. I am afraid to say, by the way, how many offers of pews and seats in church for that morning were made to us, by formal note of invitation, before we had half finished our first dinner in America; but if I may be allowed to make a moderate guess, without going into nicer calculation, I should say that at least as many sittings were proffered us as would have accommodated a score or two of grown-up families. The number of creeds and forms of religion to which the pleasure of our company was requested was in very fair proportion.

Not being able, in the absence of any change of clothes, to go to church that day, we were compelled to decline these kindnesses, one and all; and I was reluctantly obliged to forego the delight of hearing Dr. Channing, who happened to preach that morning for the first time in a very long interval. I mention the name of this distinguished and accomplished man (with whom I soon afterwards had the pleasure of becoming personally acquainted), that I may have the gratification of recording my humble tribute of admiration and respect for his high abilities and character; and for the bold philanthropy with which he has ever opposed himself to that most hideous blot and foul disgrace—Slavery.

To return to Boston. When I got into the streets upon this Sunday morning, the air was so clear, the houses were so bright and gay; the sign-boards were painted in such gaudy colours; the gilded letters were so very golden; the bricks were so very red, the stone was so very white, the blinds and area railings were so very green, the knobs and plates upon the street-doors so marvellously bright and twinkling; and all so slight and unsubstantial in appearance—that every thoroughfare in the city looked exactly like a scene in a pantomime. It rarely happens in the business streets that a tradesman—if I may venture to call anybody a tradesman, where everybody is a merchant—resides above his store; so that many occupations are often carried on in one house, and the whole front is covered with boards and inscriptions. As I walked along, I kept glancing up at these boards, confidently expecting to see a few of them change into something; and I never turned a corner suddenly without looking out for the Clown and Pantaloon, who, I had no doubt, were hiding in a doorway or behind some pillar close at hand. As to Harlequin and Columbine, I discovered immediately that they lodged (they are always looking after lodgings in a pantomime) at a very small clockmaker's, one story high, near the hotel; which, in addition to various symbols and devices, almost covering the whole front, had a great dial hanging out—to be jumped through, of course.

The suburbs are, if possible, even more unsubstantial-looking than the city. The white wooden houses (so white that it makes one wink to look at them), with their green jalousie blinds, are so sprinkled and dropped about in all directions, without seeming to have any root at all in the ground; and the small churches and chapels are so prim, and bright, and highly varnished; that I almost believed the whole affair could be taken up piecemeal like a child's toy, and crammed into a little box.

The city is a beautiful one, and cannot fail, I should imagine, to impress all strangers very favourably. The private dwelling-houses are, for the most part, large and elegant; the shops extremely good; and the public buildings handsome. The State House is built upon the summit of a hill, which rises gradually at first, and afterwards by a steep ascent, almost from the water's edge. In front is a green enclosure, called the Common. The site is beautiful: and from the top there is a charming panoramic view of the whole town and neighbourhood. In addition to a variety of commodious offices, it contains two handsome chambers: in one the House of Repre-

sentatives of the State hold their meetings: in the other, the Senate. Such proceedings as I saw here were conducted with perfect gravity and decorum; and were certainly calculated to inspire attention and respect.

There is no doubt that much of the intellectual refinement and superiority of Boston is referable to the quiet influence of the University of Cambridge, which is within three or four miles of the city. The resident professors at that university are gentlemen of learning and varied attainments; and are, without one exception that I can call to mind, men who would shed a grace upon, and do honour to, any society in the civilised world. Many of the resident gentry in Boston and its neighbourhood, and I think I am not mistaken in adding, a large majority of those who are attached to the liberal professions there, have been educated at this same school. Whatever the defects of American universities may be, they disseminate no prejudices; rear no bigots; dig up the buried ashes of no old superstitions; never interpose between the people and their improvement; exclude no man because of his religious opinions; above all, in their whole course of study and instruction, recognise a world, and a broad one too, lying beyond the college walls.

It was a source of inexpressible pleasure to me to observe the almost imperceptible, but not less certain effect, wrought by this institution among the small community of Boston; and to note at every turn the humanising tastes and desires it has engendered; the affectionate friendships to which it has given rise; the amount of vanity and prejudice it has dispelled. The golden calf they worship at Boston is a pigmy compared with the giant effigies set up in other parts of that vast counting-house which lies beyond the Atlantic; and the almighty dollar sinks into something comparatively insignificant, amidst a whole Pantheon of better gods.

Above all, I sincerely believe that the public institutions and charities of this capital of Massachusetts are as nearly perfect as the most considerate wisdom, benevolence, and humanity can make them. I never in my life was more affected by the contemplation of happiness, under circumstances of privation and bereavement, than in my visits to these establishments.

It is a great and pleasant feature of all such institutions in America, that they are either supported by the State or assisted by the State; or (in the event of their not needing its helping hand) that they act in concert with it, and are emphatically the people's. I cannot but think, with a view to the principle and its tendency to elevate or depress the character of the industrious classes, that a Public Charity is immeasurably better than a Private Foundation, no matter how munificently the latter may be endowed. In our own country, where it has not, until within these later days, been a very popular fashion with governments to display any extraordinary regard for the great mass of the people, or to recognise their existence as improvable creatures, private charities, unexampled in the history of the earth, have arisen, to do an incalculable amount of good among the destitute and afflicted. But the government of the country, having neither act nor part in them, is not in the receipt of any portion of the gratitude they inspire; and, offering very little shelter or relief beyond that which is to be found in the workhouse and the gaol, has come, not unnaturally, to be looked upon by the poor rather as a stern master, quick to correct and punish, than a kind protector, merciful and vigilant in their hour of need.

The maxim, that out of evil cometh good, is strongly illustrated by these establishments at home; as the records of the Prerogative Office in Doctors' Commons can abundantly prove. Some immensely rich old gentleman or lady, surrounded by needy relatives, makes, upon a low average, a will a week. The old gentleman or lady, never very remarkable in the best of times for good temper, is full of aches and pains from head to foot; full of fancies and caprices; full of spleen, distrust, suspicion, and dislike. To cancel old wills, and invent new ones, is at last the sole business of such a testator's existence; and relations and friends (some of whom have been bred up distinctly to inherit a large share of the property, and have been, from their cradles, specially disqualified from devoting themselves to any useful pursuit, on that account) are so often and so unexpectedly and summarily cut off, and reinstated, and cut off again, that the whole family, down to the remotest cousin, is kept in a perpetual fever. At length it becomes plain that the old lady or gentleman has not long to live; and the plainer this becomes, the more clearly the old lady or gentleman perceives that everybody is in a conspiracy against their poor old dying relative; wherefore the old lady or gentleman makes another last will—positively the last this time—conceals the same in a china teapot, and expires next day. Then it turns out, that the whole of the real and personal estate is divided between half-a-dozen charities; and that the dead-and-gone testator has in pure spite helped to do a great deal of

good, at the cost of an immense amount of evil passion and misery.

The Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, at Boston, is superintended by a body of trustees who make an annual report to the corporation. The indigent blind of that State are admitted gratuitously. Those from the adjoining State of Connecticut, or from the States of Maine, Vermont, or New Hampshire, are admitted by a warrant from the State to which they respectively belong; or, failing that, must find security among their friends, for the payment of about twenty pounds English for their first year's board and instruction, and ten for the second. "After the first year," say the trustees, "an account current will be opened with each pupil; he will be charged with the actual cost of his board, which will not exceed two dollars per week;" a trifle more than eight shillings English; "and he will be credited with the amount paid for him by the State, or by his friends; also with his earnings over and above the cost of the stock which he uses; so that all his earnings over one dollar per week will be his own. By the third year it will be known whether his earnings will more than pay the actual cost of his board; if they should, he will have it at his option to remain and receive his earnings, or not. Those who prove unable to earn their own livelihood will not be retained; as it is not desirable to convert the establishment into an almshouse, or to retain any but working bees in the hive. Those who, by physical or mental imbecility, are disqualified for work, are thereby disqualified from being members of an industrious community; and they can be better provided for in establishments fitted for the infirm."

I went to see this place one very fine winter morning: an Italian sky above, and the air so clear and bright on every side, that even my eyes, which are none of the best, could follow the minute lines and scraps of tracery in distant buildings. Like most other public institutions in America of the same class, it stands a mile or two without the town, in a cheerful, healthy spot; and is an airy, spacious, handsome edifice. It is built upon a height, commanding the harbour. When I paused for a moment at the door, and marked how fresh and free the whole scene was—what sparkling bubbles glanced upon the waves, and welled up every moment to the surface, as though the world below, like that above, were radiant with the bright day, and gushing over in its fulness of light: when I gazed from sail to sail away upon a ship at sea, a tiny speck of shining white, the only cloud upon the still, deep, distant blue—and, turning, saw a blind boy with his sightless face addressed that way, as though he too had some sense within him of the glorious distance: I felt a kind of sorrow that the place should be so very light, and a strange wish that for his sake it were darker. It was but momentary, of course, and a mere fancy, but I felt it keenly for all that.

The children were at their daily tasks in different rooms, except a few who were already dismissed, and were at play. Here, as in many institutions, no uniform is worn; and I was very glad of it, for two reasons. Firstly, because I am sure that nothing but senseless custom and want of thought would reconcile us to the liveries and badges we are so fond of at home. Secondly, because the absence of these things presents each child to the visitor in his or her own proper character, with its individuality unimpaired; not lost in a dull, ugly, monotonous repetition of the same unmeaning garb: which is really an important consideration. The wisdom of encouraging a little harmless pride in personal appearance even among the blind, or the whimsical absurdity of considering charity and leather breeches inseparable companions, as we do, requires no comment.

Good order, cleanliness, and comfort pervaded every corner of the building. The various classes, who were gathered round their teachers, answered the questions put to them with readiness and intelligence, and in a spirit of cheerful contest for precedence which pleased me very much. Those who were at play were gleesome and noisy as other children. More spiritual and affectionate friendships appeared to exist among them than would be found among other young persons suffering under no deprivation; but this I expected and was prepared to find. It is a part of the great scheme of Heaven's merciful consideration for the afflicted.

In a portion of the building, set apart for that purpose, are workshops for blind persons whose education is finished, and who have acquired a trade, but who cannot pursue it in an ordinary manufactory because of their deprivation. Several people were at work here; making brushes, mattresses, and so forth; and the cheerfulness, industry, and good order discernible in every other part of the building, extended to this department also.

On the ringing of a bell, the pupils all repaired, without any guide or leader, to a spacious music-hall, where they took their seats in an orchestra erected for that purpose, and listened with manifest delight to a voluntary on the organ, played by one of themselves. At its

conclusion, the performer, a boy of nineteen or twenty, gave place to a girl; and to her accompaniment they all sang a hymn, and afterwards a sort of chorus. It was very sad to look upon and hear them, happy though their condition unquestionably was; and I saw that one blind girl, who (being for the time deprived of the use of her limbs by illness) sat close beside me with her face towards them, wept silently the while she listened.

It is strange to watch the faces of the blind, and see how free they are from all concealment of what is passing in their thoughts; observing which, a man with eyes may blush to contemplate the mask he wears. Allowing for one shade of anxious expression which is never absent from their countenances, and the like of which we may readily detect in our own faces if we try to feel our way in the dark, every idea, as it rises within them, is expressed with the lightning's speed, and nature's truth. If the company at a rout, or drawing-room at court, could only for one time be as unconscious of the eyes upon them as blind men and women are, what secrets would come out, and what a worker of hypocrisy this sight, the loss of which we so much pity, would appear to be!

The thought occurred to me as I sat down in another room, before a girl blind, deaf, and dumb; destitute of smell; and nearly so of taste: before a fair young creature with every human faculty, and hope, and power of goodness and affection, enclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense—the sense of touch. There she was, before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound; with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an Immortal soul might be awakened.

Long before I looked upon her, the help had come. Her face was radiant with intelligence and pleasure. Her hair, braided by her own hands, was bound about a head whose intellectual capacity and development were beautifully expressed in its graceful outline, and its broad open brow; her dress, arranged by herself, was a pattern of neatness and simplicity; the work she had knitted lay beside her; her writing-book was on the desk she leaned upon. From the mournful ruin of such bereavement, there had slowly risen up this gentle, tender, guileless, grateful-hearted being.

Like other inmates of that house, she had a green ribbon bound round her eyelids. A doll she had dressed lay near upon the ground. I took it up, and saw that she had made a green fillet such as she wore herself, and fastened it about its mimic eyes.

She was seated in a little enclosure, made by school desks and forms, writing her daily journal. But soon finishing this pursuit, she engaged in an animated communication with a teacher who sat beside her. This was a favourite mistress with the poor pupil. If she could see the face of her fair instructress, she would not love her less, I am sure.

I have extracted a few disjointed fragments of her history, from an account written by that one man who has made her what she is. It is a very beautiful and touching narrative; and I wish I could present it entire.

Her name is Laura Bridgman. "She was born in Hanover, New Hampshire, on the twenty-first of December, 1829. She is described as having been a very sprightly and pretty infant, with bright blue eyes. She was, however, so puny and feeble until she was a year and a half old, that her parents hardly hoped to rear her. She was subject to severe fits, which seemed to rack her frame almost beyond her power of endurance: and life was held by the feeblest tenure: but, when a year and a half old, she seemed to rally; the dangerous symptoms subsided; and, at twenty months old, she was perfectly well.

"Then her mental powers, hitherto stinted in their growth, rapidly developed themselves; and during the four months of health which she enjoyed, she appears (making due allowance for a fond mother's account) to have displayed a considerable degree of intelligence.

"But suddenly she sickened again; her disease raged with great violence during five weeks, when her eyes and ears were inflamed, suppurated, and their contents were discharged. But though sight and hearing were gone forever, the poor child's sufferings were not ended. The fever raged during seven weeks; for five months she was kept in bed in a darkened room; it was a year before she could walk unsupported, and two years before she could sit up all day. It was now observed that her sense of smell was almost entirely destroyed; and, consequently, that her taste was much blunted.

"It was not until four years of age that the poor child's bodily health seemed restored, and she was able to enter upon her apprenticeship of life and the world.

"But what a situation was hers! The darkness and the silence of the tomb were around her: no mother's smile called forth her answering smile, no father's voice taught her to imitate his sounds:—they, brothers and sisters, were

but forms of matter which resisted her touch, but which differed not from the furniture of the house, save in warmth, and in the power of locomotion; and not even in these respects from the dog and the cat.

"But the immortal spirit which had been implanted within her could not die, nor be maimed nor mutilated; and though most of its avenues of communication with the world were cut off, it began to manifest itself through the others. As soon as she could walk, she began to explore the room, and then the house; she became familiar with the form, density, weight, and heat of every article she could lay her hands upon. She followed her mother, and felt her hands and arms, as she was occupied about the house; and her disposition to imitate, led her to repeat everything herself. She even learned to sew a little, and to knit."

The reader will scarcely need to be told, however, that the opportunities of communicating with her were very, very limited; and that the moral effects of her wretched state soon began to appear. Those who cannot be enlightened by reason can only be controlled by force; and this, coupled with her great privations, must soon have reduced her to a worse condition than that of the beasts that perish, but for timely and unhoped-for aid.

"At this time I was so fortunate as to hear of the child, and immediately hastened to Hanover to see her. I found her with a well-formed figure; a strongly-marked, nervous-sanguine temperament; a large and beautifully-shaped head; and the whole system in healthy action. The parents were easily induced to consent to her coming to Boston, and on the 4th of October, 1837, they brought her to the Institution.

"For awhile she was much bewildered; and after waiting about two weeks, until she became acquainted with her new locality, and somewhat familiar with the inmates, the attempt was made to give her knowledge of arbitrary signs, by which she could interchange thoughts with others.

"There was one of two ways to be adopted: either to go on to build up a language of signs on the basis of the natural language which she had already commenced herself, or to teach her the purely arbitrary language in common use: that is, to give her a sign for every individual thing, or to give her a knowledge of letters by combination of which she might express her idea of the existence, and the mode and condition of existence, of any thing. The former would have been easy, but very ineffectual; the latter seemed very difficult, but, if accomplished, very effectual. I determined, therefore, to try the latter.

"The first experiments were made by taking articles in common use, such as knives, forks, spoons, keys, &c., and pasting upon them labels with their names printed in raised letters. These she felt very carefully, and soon, of course, distinguished that the crooked lines *spoon* differed as much from the crooked lines *key*, as the spoon differed from the key in form.

"Then small detached labels, with the same words printed upon them, were put into her hands; and she soon observed that they were similar to the ones pasted on the articles. She showed her perception of this similarity by laying the label *key* upon the key, and the label *spoon* upon the spoon. She was encouraged here by the natural sign of approbation, patting on the head.

"The same process was then repeated with all the articles which she could handle: and she very easily learned to place the proper labels upon them. It was evident, however, that the only intellectual exercise was that of imitation and memory. She recollected that the label *book* was placed upon a book, and she repeated the process first from imitation, next from memory, with only the motive of love of approbation, but apparently without the intellectual perception of any relation between the things.

"After awhile, instead of labels, the individual letters were given to her on detached bits of paper: they were arranged side by side so as to spell *book*, *key*, &c.; then they were mixed up in a heap, and a sign was made for her to arrange them herself, so as to express the words *book*, *key*, &c.; and she did so.

"Hitherto the process had been mechanical, and the success about as great as teaching a very knowing dog a variety of tricks. The poor child had sat in mute amazement, and patiently imitated everything her teacher did; but now the truth began to flash upon her: her intellect began to work: she perceived that here was a way by which she could herself make up a sign of anything that was in her own mind, and show it to another mind; and at once her countenance lighted up with a human expression: it was no longer a dog, or parrot: it was an immortal spirit, eagerly seizing upon a new link of union with other spirits! I could almost fix upon the moment when this truth dawned upon her mind, and spread its light to her countenance; I saw that the great obstacle was overcome; and that henceforward nothing but patient and persevering, but plain and straightforward, efforts were to be used.

"The result, thus far, is quickly related, and easily conceived; but not so was the process;

for many weeks of apparently unprofitable labour were passed before it was effected.

"When it was said above, that a sign was made, it was intended to say that the action was performed by her teacher, she feeling his hands, and then imitating the motion.

"The next step was to procure a set of metal types, with the different letters of the alphabet cast upon their ends; also a board, in which were square holes, into which holes she could set the types; so that the letters on their ends could alone be felt above the surface.

"Then, on any article being handed to her,—for instance, a pencil, or a watch,—she would select the component letters, and arrange them on her board, and read them with apparent pleasure.

"She was exercised for several weeks in this way, until her vocabulary became extensive; and then the important step was taken of teaching her how to represent the different letters by the position of her fingers, instead of the cumbrous apparatus of the board and types. She accomplished this speedily and easily, for her intellect had begun to work in aid of her teacher, and her progress was rapid.

"This was the period, about three months after she had commenced, that the first report of her case was made, in which it is stated that 'she has just learned the manual alphabet, as used by the deaf mutes, and it is a subject of delight and wonder to see how rapidly, correctly, and eagerly she goes on with her labours. Her teacher gives her a new object,—for instance, a pencil,—first lets her examine it, and get an idea of its use, then teaches her how to spell it by making the signs for the letters with her own fingers: the child grasps her hand, and feels her fingers, as the different letters are formed; she turns her head a little on one side, like a person listening closely; her lips are apart; she seems scarcely to breathe; and her countenance, at first anxious, gradually changes to a smile, as she comprehends the lesson. She then holds up her tiny fingers, and spells the word in the manual alphabet; next she takes her types and arranges her letters; and last, to make sure that she is right, she takes the whole of the types composing the word, and places them upon or in contact with the pencil, or whatever the object may be.'

"The whole of the succeeding year was passed in gratifying her eager inquiries for the names of every object which she could possibly handle; in exercising her in the use of the manual alphabet; in extending in every possible way her knowledge of the physical relations of things; and in proper care of her health.

"At the end of the year a report of her case was made, from which the following is an extract.

"'It has been ascertained, beyond the possibility of doubt, that she cannot see a ray of light, cannot hear the least sound, and never exercises her sense of smell, if she have any. Thus her mind dwells in darkness and stillness, as profound as that of a closed tomb at midnight. Of beautiful sights, and sweet sounds, and pleasant odours she has no conception; nevertheless, she seems as happy and playful as a bird or a lamb; and the employment of her intellectual faculties, or the acquirement of a new idea, gives her a vivid pleasure, which is plainly marked in her expressive features. She never seems to repine, but has all the buoyancy and gaiety of childhood. She is fond of fun and frolic, and, when playing with the rest of the children, her shrill laugh sounds loudest of the group.

"'When left alone, she seems very happy if she have her knitting or sewing, and will busy herself for hours: if she have no occupation, she evidently amuses herself by imaginary dialogues, or by recalling past impressions; she counts with her fingers, or spells out names of things which she has recently learned, in the manual alphabet of the deaf mutes. In this lonely self-communion she seems to reason, reflect, and argue: if she spell a word wrong with the fingers of her right hand, she instantly strikes it with her left, as her teacher does, in sign of disapprobation; if right, then she pats herself upon the head and looks pleased. She sometimes purposely spells a word wrong with the left hand, looks roguish for a moment, and laughs, and then with the right hand strikes the left, as if to correct it.

"'During the year she has attained great dexterity in the use of the manual alphabet of the deaf mutes; and she spells out the words and sentences which she knows, so fast and so deftly, that only those accustomed to this language can follow with the eye the rapid motions of her fingers.

"'But wonderful as is the rapidity with which she writes her thoughts upon the air, still more so is the ease and accuracy with which she reads the words thus written by another; grasping their hands in hers, and following every movement of their fingers, as letter after letter conveys their meaning to her mind. It is in this way that she converses with her blind playmates, and nothing can more forcibly show the power of mind in

forcing matter to its purpose than a meeting between them. For if great talent and skill are necessary for two pantomimes to paint their thoughts and feelings by the movements of the body, and the expression of the countenance, how much greater the difficulty when darkness shrouds them both, and the one can hear no sound!

"'When Laura is walking through a passage-way, with her hands spread before her, she knows instantly every one she meets, and passes them with a sign of recognition: but if it be a girl of her own age, and especially if it be one of her favourites, there is instantly a bright smile of recognition, and a twining of arms, a grasping of hands, and a swift telegraphing upon the tiny fingers; whose rapid evolutions convey the thoughts and feelings from the outposts of one mind to those of the other. There are questions and answers, exchanges of joy or sorrow, there are kissings and partings, just as between little children with all their senses.'

"During this year, and six months after she had left home, her mother came to visit her, and the scene of their meeting was an interesting one.

"The mother stood some time, gazing with overflowing eyes upon her unfortunate child, who, all unconscious of her presence, was playing about the room. Presently Laura ran against her, and at once began feeling her hands, examining her dress, and trying to find out if she knew her; but not succeeding in this, she turned away as from a stranger, and the poor woman could not conceal the pang she felt at finding that her beloved child did not know her.

"She then gave Laura a string of beads which she used to wear at home, which were recognised by the child at once, who, with much joy, put them around her neck, and sought me eagerly to say she understood the string was from her home.

"The mother now tried to caress her, but poor Laura repelled her, preferring to be with her acquaintances.

"Another article from home was now given her, and she began to look much interested; she examined the stranger much closer, and gave me to understand that she knew she came from Hanover; she even endured her caresses, but would leave her with indifference at the slightest signal. The distress of the mother was now painful to behold; for, although she had feared that she should not be recognised, the painful reality of being treated with cold indifference by a darling child was too much for woman's nature to bear.

"After awhile, on the mother taking hold of her again, a vague idea seemed to flit across Laura's mind that this could not be a stranger; she therefore felt her hands very eagerly, while her countenance assumed an expression of intense interest; she became very pale, and then suddenly red; hope seemed struggling with doubt and anxiety, and never were contending emotions more strongly painted upon the human face: at this moment of painful uncertainty, the mother drew her close to her side, and kissed her fondly, when at once the truth flashed upon the child, and all mistrust and anxiety disappeared from her face, as with an expression of exceeding joy she eagerly nestled to the bosom of her parent, and yielded herself to her fond embraces.

"After this the beads were all unheeded; the playthings which were offered to her were utterly disregarded; her playmates, for whom but a moment before she gladly left the stranger, now vainly strove to pull her from her mother; and though she yielded her usual instantaneous obedience to my signal to follow me, it was evidently with painful reluctance. She clung close to me, as if bewildered and fearful; and when, after a moment, I took her to her mother, she sprang to her arms, and clung to her with eager joy.

"The subsequent parting between them showed alike the affection, the intelligence, and the resolution of the child.

"Laura accompanied her mother to the door, clinging close to her all the way, until they arrived at the threshold, where she paused, and felt around to ascertain who was near her. Perceiving the matron, of whom she is very fond, she grasped her with one hand, holding on convulsively to her mother with the other; and thus she stood for a moment: then she dropped her mother's hand; put her handkerchief to her eyes; and turning round, clung sobbing to the matron; while her mother departed, with emotions as deep as those of her child.

* * * * *

"It has been remarked, in former reports, that she can distinguish different degrees of intellect in others, and that she soon regarded almost with contempt a new-comer, when, after a few days, she discovered her weakness of mind. This unamiable part of her character has been more strongly developed during the past year.

"She chooses for her friends and companions those children who are intelligent, and can talk best with her; and she evidently dislikes to be with those who are deficient in intellect, unless,

indeed, she can make them serve her purposes, which she is evidently inclined to do. She takes advantage of them, and makes them wait upon her, in a manner that she knows she could not exact of others; and in various ways she shows her Saxon blood.

"She is fond of having other children noticed and caressed by the teachers, and those whom she respects; but this must not be carried too far, or she becomes jealous. She wants to have her share, which, if not the lion's, is the greater part; and if she does not get it, she says, '*My mother will love me.*'

"Her tendency to imitation is so strong, that it leads her to actions which must be entirely incomprehensible to her, and which can give her no other pleasure than the gratification of an internal faculty. She has been known to sit for half an hour, holding a book before her sightless eyes, and moving her lips, as she has observed seeing people do when reading.

"She one day pretended that her doll was sick; and went through all the motions of tending it, and giving it medicine; she then put it carefully to bed, and placed a bottle of hot water to its feet, laughing all the time most heartily. When I came home, she insisted upon my going to see it, and feel its pulse; and when I told her to put a blister on its back, she seemed to enjoy it amazingly, and almost screamed with delight.

"Her social feelings, and her affections, are very strong; and when she is sitting at work, or at her studies, by the side of one of her little friends, she will break off from her task every few moments, to hug and kiss them with an earnestness and warmth that is touching to behold.

"When left alone, she occupies, and apparently amuses herself, and seems quite contented; and so strong seems to be the natural tendency of thought to put on the garb of language, that she often soliloquises in the *finger language*, slow and tedious as it is. But it is only when alone that she is quiet: for if she becomes sensible of the presence of any one near her, she is restless until she can sit close beside them, hold their hand, and converse with them by signs.

"In her intellectual character it is pleasing to observe an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and a quick perception of the relations of things. In her moral character, it is beautiful to behold her continual gladness, her keen enjoyment of existence, her expansive love, her unhesitating confidence, her sympathy with suffering, her conscientiousness, truthfulness, and hopefulness."

Such are a few fragments from the simple but most interesting and instructive history of Laura Bridgman. The name of her great benefactor and friend, who writes it, is Doctor Howe. There are not many persons, I hope and believe, who, after reading these passages, can ever hear that name with indifference.

A further account has been published by Doctor Howe, since the report from which I have just quoted. It describes her rapid mental growth and improvement during twelve months more, and brings her little history down to the end of last year. It is very remarkable that as we dream in words, and carry on imaginary conversations, in which we speak both for ourselves and for the shadows who appear to us in those visions of the night, so she, having no words, uses her finger alphabet in her sleep. And it has been ascertained that when her slumber is broken, and is much disturbed by dreams, she expresses her thoughts in an irregular and confused manner on her fingers: just as we should murmur and mutter them indistinctly in the like circumstances.

I turned over the leaves of her Diary, and found it written in a fair, legible, square hand, and expressed in terms which were quite intelligible without any explanation. On my saying that I should like to see her write again, the teacher who sat beside her bade her, in their language, sign her name upon a slip of paper twice or thrice. In doing so, I observed that she kept her left hand always touching and following up her right, in which, of course, she held the pen. No line was indicated by any contrivance, but she wrote straight and freely.

She had, until now, been quite unconscious of the presence of visitors; but, having her hand placed in that of the gentleman who accompanied me, she immediately expressed his name upon her teacher's palm. Indeed, her sense of touch is now so exquisite, that having been acquainted with a person once, she can recognise him or her after almost any interval. This gentleman had been in her company, I believe, but very seldom, and certainly had not seen her for many months. My hand she rejected at once, as she does that of any man who is a stranger to her. But she retained my wife's with evident pleasure, kissed her, and examined her dress with a girl's curiosity and interest.

She was merry and cheerful, and showed much innocent playfulness in her intercourse with her teacher. Her delight on recognising a favourite playfellow and companion—herself a blind girl—who silently, and with an equal enjoyment of the coming surprise, took her seat beside her, was beautiful to witness. It elicited from her at first,

as other slight circumstances did twice or thrice during my visit, an uncouth noise which was rather painful to hear. But, on her teacher touching her lips, she immediately desisted, and embraced her laughingly and affectionately.

I had previously been into another chamber, where a number of blind boys were swinging, and climbing, and engaged in various sports. They all clamoured, as we entered, to the assistant master, who accompanied us, "Look at me, Mr. Hart! Please, Mr. Hart, look at me!" evincing, I thought, even in this, an anxiety peculiar to their condition, that their little feats of agility should be *seen*. Among them was a small laughing fellow, who stood aloof, entertaining himself with a gymnastic exercise for bringing the arms and chest into play; which he enjoyed mightily; especially when, in thrusting out his right arm, he brought it into contact with another boy. Like Laura Bridgman, this young child was deaf, and dumb, and blind.

Doctor Howe's account of this pupil's first instruction is so very striking, and so intimately connected with Laura herself, that I cannot refrain from a short extract. I may premise that the poor boy's name is Oliver Caswell; that he is thirteen years of age; and that he was in full possession of all his faculties until three years and four months old. He was then attacked by scarlet fever: in four weeks became deaf; in a few weeks more, blind; in six months, dumb. He showed his anxious sense of this last deprivation by often feeling the lips of other persons when they were talking, and then putting his hand upon his own, as if to assure himself that he had them in the right position.

"His thirst for knowledge," says Doctor Howe, "proclaimed itself as soon as he entered the house, by his eager examination of everything he could feel or smell in his new location. For instance, treading upon the register of a furnace, he instantly stooped down and began to feel it, and soon discovered the way in which the upper plate moved upon the lower one; but this was not enough for him, so, lying down upon his face, he applied his tongue first to one, then to the other, and seemed to discover that they were of different kinds of metal.

"His signs were expressive: and the strictly natural language, laughing, crying, sighing, kissing, embracing, &c., was perfect.

"Some of the analogical signs which (guided by his faculty of imitation) he had contrived, were comprehensible; such as the waving motion of his hand for the motion of a boat, the circular one for a wheel, &c.

"The first object was to break up the use of these signs, and to substitute for them the use of purely arbitrary ones.

"Profiting by the experience I had gained in the other cases, I omitted several steps of the process before employed, and commenced at once with the finger language. Taking, therefore, several articles having short names, such as key, cup, mug, &c., and with Laura for an auxiliary, I sat down, and taking his hand, placed it upon one of them, and then with my own made the letters *k e y*. He felt my hands eagerly with both of his, and, on my repeating the process, he evidently tried to imitate the motions of my fingers. In a few minutes he contrived to feel the motions of my fingers with one hand, and holding out the other, he tried to imitate them, laughing most heartily when he succeeded. Laura was by, interested even to agitation; and the two presented a singular sight: her face was flushed and anxious, and her fingers twined in among ours so closely as to follow every motion, but so lightly as not to embarrass them; while Oliver stood attentive, his head a little aside, his face turned up, his left hand grasping mine, and his right held out; at every motion of my fingers his countenance betokened keen attention; there was an expression of anxiety as he tried to imitate the motions; then a smile came stealing out as he thought he could do so, and spread into a joyous laugh the moment he succeeded, and felt me pat his head, and Laura clap him heartily upon the back, and jump up and down in her joy.

"He learned more than a half-dozen letters in half an hour, and seemed delighted with his success, at least in gaining approbation. His attention then began to flag, and I commenced playing with him. It was evident that in all this he had merely been imitating the motions of my fingers, and placing his hand upon the key, cup, &c., as part of the process, without any perception of the relation between the sign and the object.

"When he was tired with play I took him back to the table, and he was quite ready to begin again his process of imitation. He soon learned to make the letters for *key*, *pen*, *pin*; and, by having the object repeatedly placed in his hand, he at last perceived the relation I wished to establish between them. This was evident, because, when I made the letters *p i n*, or *p e n*, or *c u p*, he would select the article.

"The perception of this relation was not accompanied by that radiant flash of intelligence, and that glow of joy, which marked the delightful moment when Laura first perceived it. I then placed all the articles on the table, and going away a little distance with the children,

placed Oliver's fingers in the positions to spell *key*, on which Laura went and brought the article: the little fellow seemed to be much amused by this, and looked very attentive and smiling. I then caused him to make the letters *b r e a d*, and in an instant Laura went and brought him a piece; he smelled at it; put it to his lips; cocked up his head with a most knowing look; seemed to reflect a moment; and then laughed outright, as much as to say, 'Aha! I understand now how something may be made out of this.'

"It was now clear that he had the capacity and inclination to learn, that he was a proper subject for instruction, and needed only persevering attention. I therefore put him in the hands of an intelligent teacher, nothing doubting of his rapid progress."

Well may this gentleman call that a delightful moment, in which some distant promise of her present state first gleamed upon the darkened mind of Laura Bridgman. Throughout his life, the recollection of that moment will be to him a source of pure, unfading happiness; nor will it shine least brightly on the evening of his days of Noble Usefulness.

The affection that exists between these two—the master and the pupil—is as far removed from all ordinary care and regard, as the circumstances in which it has had its growth are apart from the common occurrences of life. He is occupied now in devising means of imparting to her higher knowledge, and of conveying to her some adequate idea of the Great Creator of that universe in which, dark and silent and scentless though it be to her, she has such deep delight and glad enjoyment.

Ye who have eyes and see not, and have ears and hear not; ye who are as the hypocrites of sad countenances, and disfigure your faces that ye may seem unto men to fast; learn healthy cheerfulness, and mild contentment, from the deaf, and dumb, and blind! Self-elected saints with gloomy brows, this sightless, earless, voiceless child may teach you lessons you will do well to follow. Let that poor hand of hers lie gently on your hearts; for there may be something in its healing touch akin to that of the Great Master whose precepts you misconstrue, whose lessons you pervert, of whose charity and sympathy with all the world not one among you, in his daily practice, knows as much as many of the worst among those fallen sinners, to whom you are liberal in nothing but the preachment of perdition!

As I rose to quit the room, a pretty little child of one of the attendants came running in to greet its father. For the moment, a child with eyes among the sightless crowd impressed me almost as painfully as the blind boy in the porch had done, two hours ago. Ah! how much brighter and more deeply blue, glowing and rich though it had been before, was the scene without, contrasting with the darkness of so many youthful lives within!

At South Boston, as it is called, in a situation excellently adapted for the purpose, several charitable institutions are clustered together. One of these is the State Hospital for the insane; admirably conducted on those enlightened principles of conciliation and kindness, which twenty years ago would have been worse than heretical, and which have been acted upon with so much success in our own pauper asylum at Hanwell. "Evince a desire to show some confidence, and repose some trust, even in mad people," said the resident physician, as we walked along the galleries, his patients flocking round us unrestrained. Of those who deny or doubt the wisdom of this maxim after witnessing its effects, if there be such people still alive, I can only say that I hope I may never be summoned as a Juryman on a Commission of Lunacy whereof they are the subjects; for I should certainly find them out of their senses, on such evidence alone.

Each ward in this institution is shaped like a long gallery or hall, with the dormitories of the patients opening from it on either hand. Here they work, read, play at skittles, and other games; and, when the weather does not admit of their taking exercise out of doors, pass the day together. In one of these rooms, seated calmly, and quite as a matter of course, among a throng of madwomen, black and white, were the physician's wife and another lady, with a couple of children. These ladies were graceful and handsome; and it was not difficult to perceive, at a glance, that even their presence there had a highly beneficial influence on the patients who were grouped about them.

Leaning her head against the chimney-piece, with a great assumption of dignity and refinement of manner, sat an elderly female, in as many scraps of finery as Madge Wildfire herself. Her head in particular was so strewn with scraps of gauze and cotton and bits of paper, and had so many queer odds and ends stuck all about it, that it looked like a bird's nest. She was radiant with imaginary jewels; wore a rich pair of undoubted gold spectacles; and gracefully dropped upon her lap, as we approached, a very old,

greasy newspaper, in which I dare say she had been reading an account of her own presentation at some Foreign Court.

I have been thus particular in describing her, because she will serve to exemplify the physician's manner of acquiring and retaining the confidence of his patients.

"This," he said aloud, taking me by the hand, and advancing to the fantastic figure with great politeness—not raising her suspicions by the slightest look or whisper, or any kind of aside, to me: "this lady is the hostess of this mansion, sir. It belongs to her. Nobody else has anything whatever to do with it. It is a large establishment, as you see, and requires a great number of attendants. She lives, you observe, in the very first style. She is kind enough to receive my visits, and to permit my wife and family to reside here; for which, it is hardly necessary to say, we are much indebted to her. She is exceedingly courteous, you perceive,"—on this hint she bowed condescendingly,—"and will permit me to have the pleasure of introducing you: a gentleman from England, ma'am: newly arrived from England, after a very tempestuous passage: Mr. Dickens—the lady of the house!"

We exchanged the most dignified salutations with profound gravity and respect, and so went on. The rest of the madwomen seemed to understand the joke perfectly (not only in this case, but in all the others, except their own), and to be highly amused by it. The nature of their several kinds of insanity was made known to me in the same way, and we left each of them in high good-humour. Not only is a thorough confidence established, by these means, between physician and patient, in respect of the nature and extent of their hallucinations, but it is easy to understand that opportunities are afforded for seizing any moment of reason, to startle them by placing their own delusion before them in its most incongruous and ridiculous light.

Every patient in this asylum sits down to dinner every day with a knife and fork; and in the midst of them sits the gentleman, whose manner of dealing with his charges I have just described. At every meal, moral influence alone restrains the more violent among them from cutting the throats of the rest; but the effect of that influence is reduced to an absolute certainty, and is found, even as a means of restraint, to say nothing of it as a means of cure, a hundred times more efficacious than all the strait-waistcoats, fetters, and handcuffs that ignorance, prejudice and cruelty have manufactured since the creation of the world.

In the labour department, every patient is as freely trusted with the tools of his trade as if he were a sane man. In the garden, and on the farm, they work with spades, rakes, and hoes. For amusement, they walk, run, fish, paint, read, and ride out to take the air in carriages provided for the purpose. They have among themselves a sewing society to make clothes for the poor, which holds meetings, passes resolutions, never comes to fisticuffs or bowie-knives, as sane assemblies have been known to do elsewhere; and conducts all its proceedings with the greatest decorum. The irritability, which would otherwise be expended on their own flesh, clothes, and furniture, is dissipated in these pursuits. They are cheerful, tranquil, and healthy.

Once a week they have a ball, in which the Doctor and his family, with all the nurses and attendants, take an active part. Dances and marches are performed alternately, to the enlivening strains of a piano; and now and then some gentleman or lady (whose proficiency has been previously ascertained) obliges the company with a song; nor does it ever degenerate, at a tender crisis, into a screech or a howl; wherein, I must confess, I should have thought the danger lay. At an early hour they all meet together for these festive purposes; at eight o'clock refreshments are served; and at nine they separate.

Immense politeness and good-breeding are observed throughout. They all take their tone from the Doctor; and he moves a very Chesterfield among the company. Like other assemblies, these entertainments afford a fruitful topic of conversation among the ladies for some days; and the gentlemen are so anxious to shine on these occasions, that they have been sometimes found "practising their steps" in private, to cut a more distinguished figure in the dance.

It is obvious that one great feature of this system is the inculcation and encouragement, even among such unhappy persons, of a decent self-respect. Something of the same spirit pervades all the Institutions at South Boston.

There is the House of Industry. In that branch of it which is devoted to the reception of old or otherwise helpless paupers, these words are painted on the walls: "Worthy of Notice. Self-Government, Quietude, and Peace are Blessings." It is not assumed and taken for granted that, being there, they must be evil-disposed and wicked people, before whose vicious eyes it is necessary to flourish threats and harsh restraints. They are met at the very threshold with this mild appeal. All within doors is very plain and simple, as it

ought to be, but arranged with a view to peace and comfort. It costs no more than any other plan of arrangement, but it bespeaks an amount of consideration for those who are reduced to seek a shelter there, which puts them at once upon their gratitude and good behaviour. Instead of being parcelled out in great, long, rambling wards, where a certain amount of weazen life may mope, and pine, and shiver all day long, the building is divided into separate rooms, each with its share of light and air. In these the better kind of paupers live. They have a motive for exertion and becoming pride, in the desire to make these little chambers comfortable and decent. I do not remember one but it was clean and neat, and had its plant or two upon the window-sill, or row of crockery upon the shelf, or small display of coloured prints upon the whitewashed wall, or, perhaps, its wooden clock behind the door.

The orphans and young children are in an adjoining building; separate from this, but a part of the same Institution. Some are such little creatures that the stairs are of Lilliputian measurement, fitted to their tiny strides. The same consideration for their years and weakness is expressed in their very seats, which are perfect curiosities, and look like articles of furniture for a pauper doll's house. I can imagine the glee of our Poor-Law Commissioners at the notion of these seats having arms and backs; but small spines being of older date than their occupation of the Board-room at Somerset House, I thought even this provision very merciful and kind.

Here, again, I was greatly pleased with the inscriptions on the wall, which were scraps of plain morality, easily remembered and understood: such as "Love one another"—"God remembers the smallest creature in his creation:" and straightforward advice of that nature. The books and tasks of these smallest of scholars were adapted, in the same judicious manner, to their childish powers. When we had examined these lessons, four morsels of girls (of whom one was blind) sang a little song about the merry month of May, which I thought (being extremely dismal) would have suited an English November better. That done, we went to see their sleeping-rooms on the floor above, in which the arrangements were no less excellent and gentle than those we had seen below. And after observing that the teachers were of a class and character well suited to the spirit of the place, I took leave of the infants with a lighter heart than ever I have taken leave of pauper infants yet.

Connected with the House of Industry, there is also a Hospital, which was in the best order, and had, I am glad to say, many beds unoccupied. It had one fault, however, which is common to all American interiors: the presence of the eternal, accursed, suffocating, red-hot demon of a stove, whose breath would blight the purest air under Heaven.

There are two establishments for boys in this same neighbourhood. One is called the Boylston School, and is an asylum for neglected and indigent boys who have committed no crime, but who, in the ordinary course of things, would very soon be purged of that distinction if they were not taken from the hungry streets and sent here. The other is a House of Reformation for Juvenile Offenders. They are both under the same roof, but the two classes of boys never come in contact.

The Boylston boys, as may be readily supposed, have very much the advantage of the others in point of personal appearance. They were in their schoolroom when I came upon them, and answered correctly, without book, such questions as where was England; how far was it; what was its population; its capital city; its form of government; and so forth. They sang a song, too, about a farmer sowing his seed: with corresponding action at such parts as "'tis thus he sows," "he turns him round," "he claps his hands;" which gave it greater interest for them, and accustomed them to act together in an orderly manner. They appeared exceedingly well taught, and not better taught than fed; for a more chubby-looking, full-waistcoated set of boys I never saw.

The juvenile offenders had not such pleasant faces by a great deal, and in this establishment there were many boys of colour. I saw them first at their work (basket-making, and the manufacture of palm-leaf hats), afterwards in their school, where they sang a chorus in praise of Liberty: an odd, and, one would think, rather aggravating, theme for prisoners. These boys were divided into four classes, each denoted by a numeral, worn on a badge upon the arm. On the arrival of a new-comer, he is put into the fourth or lowest class, and left, by good behaviour, to work his way up into the first. The design and object of this Institution is to reclaim the youthful criminal by firm, but kind and judicious, treatment; to make his prison a place of purification and improvement, not of demoralisation and corruption; to impress upon him that there is but one path, and that one sober industry, which can ever lead him to hap-

piness; to teach him how it may be trodden, if his footsteps have never yet been led that way; and to lure him back to it, if they have strayed: in a word, to snatch him from destruction, and restore him to society a penitent and useful member. The importance of such an establishment, in every point of view, and with reference to every consideration of humanity and social policy, requires no comment.

One other establishment closes the catalogue. It is the House of Correction for the State, in which silence is strictly maintained, but where the prisoners have the comfort and mental relief of seeing each other, and of working together. This is the improved system of Prison Discipline which we have imported into England, and which has been in successful operation among us for some years past.

America, as a new and not over-populated country, has in all her prisons the one great advantage of being enabled to find useful and profitable work for the inmates: whereas, with us, the prejudice against prison labour is naturally very strong, and almost insurmountable, when honest men, who have not offended against the laws, are frequently doomed to seek employment in vain. Even in the United States, the principle of bringing convict labour and free labour into a competition which must obviously be to the disadvantage of the latter, has already found many opponents, whose number is not likely to diminish with access of years.

For this very reason, though, our best prisons would seem at the first glance to be better conducted than those of America. The treadmill is accompanied with little or no noise; five hundred men may pick oakum in the same room without a sound; and both kinds of labour admit of such keen and vigilant superintendence, as will render even a word of personal communication among the prisoners almost impossible. On the other hand, the noise of the loom, the forge, the carpenter's hammer, or the stonemason's saw greatly favours those opportunities of intercourse—hurried and brief, no doubt, but opportunities still—which these several kinds of work, by rendering it necessary for men to be employed very near to each other, and often side by side, without any barrier or partition between them, in their very nature present. A visitor, too, requires to reason and reflect a little, before the sight of a number of men engaged in ordinary labour, such as he is accustomed to out of doors, will impress him half as strongly as the contemplation of the same persons in the same place and garb would, if they were occupied in some task, marked and degraded everywhere as belonging only to felons in gaols. In an American State prison, or house of correction, I found it difficult at first to persuade myself that I was really in a gaol: a place of ignominious punishment and endurance. And to this hour I very much question whether the humane boast, that it is not like one, has its root in the true wisdom or philosophy of the matter.

I hope I may not be misunderstood on this subject, for it is one in which I take a strong and deep interest. I incline as little to the sickly feeling which makes every canting lie or maudlin speech of a notorious criminal a subject of newspaper report and general sympathy, as I do to those good old customs of the good old times which made England, even so recently as in the reign of the Third King George, in respect of her criminal code and her prison regulations, one of the most bloody-minded and barbarous countries on the earth. If I thought it would do any good to the rising generation, I would cheerfully give my consent to the disinterment of the bones of any genteel highwayman (the more genteel, the more cheerfully), and to their exposure, piecemeal, on any sign-post, gate, or gibbet that might be deemed a good elevation for the purpose. My reason is as well convinced that these gentry were utterly worthless and debauched villains, as it is that the laws and gaols hardened them in their evil courses, or that their wonderful escapes were effected by the prison turnkeys who, in those admirable days, had always been felons themselves, and were, to the last, their bosom friends and pot companions. At the same time, I know, as all men do or should, that the subject of Prison Discipline is one of the highest importance to any community; and that, in her sweeping reform and bright example to other countries on this head, America has shown great wisdom, great benevolence, and exalted policy. In contrasting her system with that which we have modelled upon it, I merely seek to show that, with all its drawbacks, ours has some advantages of its own.*

* Apart from profit made by the useful labour of prisoners, which we can never hope to realise to any great extent, and which it is perhaps not expedient for us to try to gain, there are two prisons in London, in all respects equal, and in some decidedly superior, to any I saw, or have ever heard or read of, in America. One is the Tothill Fields Bridewell, conducted by Lieutenant A. F. Tracey, R.N.; the other the Middlesex House of Correction, superintended by Mr. Chesterton. This gentleman also holds an appointment in the Public Service. Both are enlightened and superior men: and it would be as difficult to find persons better qualified for

The House of Correction which has led to these remarks is not walled, like other prisons, but is palisaded round about with tall rough stakes, something after the manner of an enclosure for keeping elephants in, as we see it represented in Eastern prints and pictures. The prisoners wear a party-coloured dress; and those who are sentenced to hard labour work at nail-making or stone-cutting. When I was there, the latter class of labourers were employed upon the stone for a new Custom House in course of erection at Boston. They appeared to shape it skilfully and with expedition, though there were very few among them (if any) who had not acquired the art within the prison gates.

The women, all in one large room, were employed in making light clothing for New Orleans and the Southern States. They did their work in silence, like the men; and, like them, were overlooked by the person contracting for their labour, or by some agent of his appointment. In addition to this, they are every moment liable to be visited by the prison officers appointed for that purpose.

The arrangements for cooking, washing of clothes, and so forth, are much upon the plan of those I have seen at home. Their mode of bestowing the prisoners at night (which is of general adoption) differs from ours, and is both simple and effective. In the centre of a lofty area, lighted by windows in the four walls, are five tiers of cells, one above the other; each tier having before it a light iron gallery, attainable by stairs of the same construction and material; excepting the lower one, which is on the ground. Behind these, back to back with them, and facing the opposite wall, are five corresponding rows of cells, accessible by similar means: so that, supposing the prisoners locked up in their cells, an officer stationed on the ground, with his back to the wall, has half their number under his eye at once; the remaining half being equally under the observation of another officer on the opposite side; and all in one great apartment. Unless this watch be corrupted or sleeping on his post, it is impossible for a man to escape; for even in the event of his forcing the iron door of his cell without noise (which is exceedingly improbable), the moment he appears outside, and steps into that one of the five galleries on which it is situated, he must be plainly and fully visible to the officer below. Each of these cells holds a small truckle-bed, in which one prisoner sleeps; never more. It is small, of course; and the door being not solid, but grated, and without blind or curtain, the prisoner within is at all times exposed to the observation and inspection of any guard who may pass along that tier at any hour or minute of the night. Every day, the prisoners receive their dinner, singly, through a trap in the kitchen wall; and each man carries his to his sleeping cell to eat it, where he is locked up alone, for that purpose, one hour. The whole of this arrangement struck me as being admirable; and I hope that the next new prison we erect in England may be built on this plan.

I was given to understand that in this prison no swords or fire-arms, or even cudgels, are kept; nor is it probable that, so long as its present excellent management continues, any weapon, offensive or defensive, will ever be required within its bounds.

Such are the Institutions at South Boston! In all of them, the unfortunate or degenerate citizens of the State are carefully instructed in their duties both to God and man; are surrounded by all reasonable means of comfort and happiness that their condition will admit of; are appealed to as members of the great human family, however afflicted, indigent, or fallen; are ruled by the strong Heart, and not by the strong (though immeasurably weaker) Hand. I have described them at some length: firstly, because their worth demanded it; and secondly, because I mean to take them for a model, and to content myself with saying of others we may come to, whose design and purpose are the same, that in this or that respect they practically fail, or differ.

I wish by this account of them, imperfect in its execution, but, in its just intention, honest, I could hope to convey to my readers one hundredth part of the gratification the sights I have described afforded me.

To an Englishman, accustomed to the paraphernalia of Westminster Hall, an American Court of Law is as odd a sight as, I suppose, an English Court of Law would be to an American. Except in the Supreme Court at Washington (where the judges wear a plain black robe), there is no such thing as a wig or gown connected with the administration of justice. The gentlemen of the bar, being barristers and attorneys too (for there is no division of those functions as in England), are no more removed from their clients than attorneys in our Court

the functions they discharge with firmness, zeal, intelligence, and humanity, as it would be to exceed the perfect order and arrangement of the institutions they govern.

for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors are from theirs. The jury are quite at home, and make themselves as comfortable as circumstances will permit. The witness is so little elevated above, or put aloof from, the crowd in the court, that a stranger entering during a pause in the proceedings would find it difficult to pick him out from the rest. And if it chanced to be a criminal trial, his eyes, in nine cases out of ten, would wander to the dock in search of the prisoner in vain; for that gentleman would most likely be lounging among the most distinguished ornaments of the legal profession, whispering suggestions in his counsel's ear, or making a toothpick out of an old quill with his penknife.

I could not but notice these differences when I visited the courts at Boston. I was much surprised at first, too, to observe that the counsel who interrogated the witness under examination at the time did so *sitting*. But seeing that he was also occupied in writing down the answers, and remembering that he was alone, and had no "junior," I quickly consoled myself with the reflection that law was not quite so expensive an article here as at home; and that the absence of sundry formalities, which we regard as indispensable, had doubtless a very favourable influence upon the bill of costs.

In every court ample and commodious provision is made for the accommodation of the citizens. This is the case all through America. In every Public Institution, the right of the people to attend, and to have an interest in the proceedings, is most fully and distinctly recognised. There are no grim door-keepers to dole out their tardy civility by the sixpennyworth; nor is there, I sincerely believe, any insolence of office of any kind. Nothing national is exhibited for money; and no public officer is a showman. We have begun, of late years, to imitate this good example. I hope we shall continue to do so; and that, in the fulness of time, even deans and chapters may be converted.

In the civil court an action was trying for damages sustained in some accident upon a railway. The witnesses had been examined, and counsel was addressing the jury. The learned gentleman (like a few of his English brethren) was desperately long-winded, and had a remarkable capacity of saying the same thing over and over again. His great theme was "Warren the ĕn*gine* driver," whom he pressed into the service of every sentence he uttered. I listened to him for about a quarter of an hour; and, coming out of court at the expiration of that time, without the faintest ray of enlightenment as to the merits of the case, felt as if I were at home again.

In the prisoner's cell, waiting to be examined by the magistrate on a charge of theft, was a boy. This lad, instead of being committed to a common gaol, would be sent to the asylum at South Boston, and there taught a trade; and, in the course of time, he would be bound apprentice to some respectable master. Thus his detection in this offence, instead of being the prelude to a life of infamy and a miserable death, would lead, there was a reasonable hope, to his being reclaimed from vice, and becoming a worthy member of society.

I am by no means a wholesale admirer of our legal solemnities, many of which impress me as being exceedingly ludicrous. Strange as it may seem, too, there is undoubtedly a degree of protection in the wig and gown—a dismissal of individual responsibility in dressing for the part—which encourages that insolent bearing and language, and that gross perversion of the office of a pleader for The Truth, so frequent in our courts of law. Still, I cannot help doubting whether America, in her desire to shake off the absurdities and abuses of the old system, may not have gone too far into the opposite extreme; and whether it is not desirable, especially in the small community of a city like this, where each man knows the other, to surround the administration of justice with some artificial barriers against the "Hail fellow, well met" deportment of every-day life. All the aid it can have in the very high character and ability of the Bench, not only here, but elsewhere, it has, and well deserves to have; but it may need something more: not to impress the thoughtful and the well informed, but the ignorant and heedless; a class which includes some prisoners and many witnesses. These institutions were established, no doubt, upon the principle that those who had so large a share in making the laws would certainly respect them. But experience has proved this hope to be fallacious; for no men know better than the judges of America, that on the occasion of any great popular excitement the law is powerless, and cannot, for the time, assert its own supremacy.

The tone of society in Boston is one of perfect politeness, courtesy, and good-breeding. The ladies are unquestionably very beautiful—in face: but there I am compelled to stop. Their education is much as with us; neither better nor worse. I had heard some very marvellous stories in this respect; but not believing them, was not disappointed. Blue ladies there are in Boston; but, like philosophers of that

colour and sex in most other latitudes, they rather desire to be thought superior than to be so. Evangelical ladies there are, likewise, whose attachment to the forms of religion, and horror of theatrical entertainments, are most exemplary. Ladies who have a passion for attending lectures are to be found among all classes and all conditions. In the kind of provincial life which prevails in cities such as this, the Pulpit has great influence. The peculiar province of the Pulpit in New England (always excepting the Unitarian ministry) would appear to be the denouncement of all innocent and rational amusements. The church, the chapel, and the lecture-room are the only means of excitement excepted; and to the church, the chapel, and the lecture-room the ladies resort in crowds.

Wherever religion is resorted to as a strong drink, and as an escape from the dull, monotonous round of home, those of its ministers who pepper the highest will be the surest to please. They who strew the Eternal Path with the greatest amount of brimstone, and who most ruthlessly tread down the flowers and leaves that grow by the wayside, will be voted the most righteous; and they who enlarge with the greatest pertinacity on the difficulty of getting into heaven will be considered, by all true believers, certain of going there: though it would be hard to say by what process of reasoning this conclusion is arrived at. It is so at home, and it is so abroad. With regard to the other means of excitement, the Lecture, it has at least the merit of being always new. One lecture treads so quickly on the heels of another, that none are remembered; and the course of this month may be safely repeated next, with its charm of novelty unbroken, and its interest unabated.

The fruits of the earth have their growth in corruption. Out of the rottenness of these things there has sprung up in Boston a sect of philosophers known as Transcendentalists. On inquiring what this appellation might be supposed to signify, I was given to understand that whatever was unintelligible would be certainly transcendental. Not deriving much comfort from this elucidation, I pursued the inquiry still further, and found that the Transcendentalists are followers of my friend Mr. Carlyle, or I should rather say, of a follower of his, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson. This gentleman has written a volume of Essays, in which, among much that is dreamy and fanciful (if he will pardon me for saying so), there is much more that is true and manly, honest and bold. Transcendentalism has its occasional vagaries (what school has not?), but it has good healthful qualities in spite of them: not least among the number a hearty disgust of Cant, and an aptitude to detect her in all the million varieties of her everlasting wardrobe. And therefore, if I were a Bostonian, I think I would be a Transcendentalist.

The only preacher I heard in Boston was Mr. Taylor, who addresses himself peculiarly to seamen, and who was once a mariner himself. I found his chapel down among the shipping, in one of the narrow, old, water-side streets, with a gay blue flag waving freely from its roof. In the gallery opposite to the pulpit were a little choir of male and female singers, a violoncello, and a violin. The preacher already sat in the pulpit, which was raised on pillars, and ornamented behind him with painted drapery of a lively and somewhat theatrical appearance. He looked a weather-beaten, hard-featured man, of about six or eight and fifty; with deep lines graven as it were into his face, dark hair, and a stern, keen eye. Yet the general character of his countenance was pleasant and agreeable.

The service commenced with a hymn, to which succeeded an extemporary prayer. It had the fault of frequent repetition, incidental to all such prayers; but it was plain and comprehensive in its doctrines, and breathed a tone of general sympathy and charity, which is not so commonly a characteristic of this form of address to the Deity as it might be. That done, he opened his discourse, taking for his text a passage from the Song of Solomon, laid upon the desk before the commencement of the service by some unknown member of the congregation: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of her beloved?"

He handled his text in all kinds of ways, and twisted it into all manner of shapes; but always ingeniously, and with a rude eloquence, well adapted to the comprehension of his hearers. Indeed, if I be not mistaken, he studied their sympathies and understandings much more than the display of his own powers. His imagery was all drawn from the sea, and from the incidents of a seaman's life; and was often remarkably good. He spoke to them of "that glorious man, Lord Nelson," and of Collingwood; and drew nothing in, as the saying is, by the head and shoulders, but brought it to bear upon his purpose naturally, and with a sharp mind to its effect. Sometimes, when much excited with his subject, he had an odd way—compounded of John Bunyan, and Balfour of Burley—of taking his great quarto Bible under his arm, and pacing

up and down the pulpit with it; looking steadily down, meantime, into the midst of the congregation. Thus, when he applied his text to the first assemblage of his hearers, and pictured the wonder of the church at their presumption in forming a congregation among themselves, he stopped short with his Bible under his arm in the manner I have described, and pursued his discourse after this manner:

"Who are these—who are they—who are these fellows? Where do they come from? Where are they going to?—Come from! What's the answer?"—leaning out of the pulpit, and pointing downward with his right hand: "From below!"—starting back again, and looking at the sailors before him: "from below, my brethren. From under the hatches of sin, battened down above you by the evil one. That's where you came from!"—a walk up and down the pulpit: "and where are you going?"—stopping abruptly: "where are you going? Aloft!"—very softly, and pointing upward: "aloft!"—louder: "aloft!"—louder still: "that's where you are going—with a fair wind,—all taut and trim, steering direct for Heaven in its glory, where there are no storms or foul weather, and where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."—Another walk: "That's where you're going to, my friends. That's it. That's the place. That's the port. That's the haven. It's a blessed harbour—still water there, in all changes of the winds and tides; no driving ashore upon the rocks, or slipping your cables and running out to sea, there: Peace—Peace—Peace—all peace!"—Another walk, and patting the Bible under his left arm: "What! these fellows are coming from the wilderness, are they? Yes. From the dreary, blighted wilderness of Iniquity, whose only crop is Death. But do they lean upon anything—do they lean upon nothing, these poor seamen?"—Three raps upon the Bible: "Oh yes!—Yes.—They lean upon the arm of their Beloved"—three more raps: "upon the arm of their Beloved"—three more, and a walk: "Pilot, guiding-star, and compass, all in one, to all hands—here it is"—three more: "here it is. They can do their seaman's duty manfully, and be easy in their minds in the utmost peril and danger, with this"—two more: "they can come, even these poor fellows can come, from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of their Beloved, and go up—up—up!"—raising his hand higher and higher at every repetition of the word, so that he stood with it at last stretched above his head, regarding them in a strange, rapt manner, and pressing the book triumphantly to his breast, until he gradually subsided into some other portion of his discourse.

I have cited this rather as an instance of the preacher's eccentricities than his merits, though, taken in connection with his look and manner, and the character of his audience, even this was striking. It is possible, however, that my favourable impression of him may have been greatly influenced and strengthened, firstly, by his impressing upon his hearers that the true observance of religion was not inconsistent with a cheerful deportment and an exact discharge of the duties of their station, which, indeed, it scrupulously required of them; and secondly, by his cautioning them not to set up any monopoly in Paradise and its mercies. I never heard these two points so wisely touched (if, indeed, I have ever heard them touched at all) by any preacher of that kind before.

Having passed the time I spent in Boston in making myself acquainted with these things, in settling the course I should take in my future travels, and in mixing constantly with its society, I am not aware that I have any occasion to prolong this chapter. Such of its social customs as I have not mentioned, however, may be told in a very few words.

The usual dinner hour is two o'clock. A dinner-party takes place at five; and at an evening party they seldom sup later than eleven; so that it goes hard but one gets home, even from a rout, by midnight. I never could find out any difference between a party at Boston and a party in London, saving that at the former place all assemblies are held at more rational hours; that the conversation may possibly be a little louder and more cheerful; that a guest is usually expected to ascend to the very top of the house to take his cloak off; that he is certain to see, at every dinner, an unusual amount of poultry on the table; and at every supper, at least two mighty bowls of hot stewed oysters, in any one of which a half-grown Duke of Clarence might be smothered easily.

There are two theatres in Boston, of good size and construction, but sadly in want of patronage. The few ladies who resort to them sit, as of right, in the front rows of the boxes.

The bar is a large room with a stone floor, and there people stand and smoke, and lounge about all the evening: dropping in and out as the humour takes them. There, too, the stranger is initiated into the mysteries of Gin-sling, Cocktail, Sangaree, Mint Julep, Sherry Cobbler, Timber Doodle, and other rare drinks. The house is full of boarders, both married and single, many of whom sleep upon the premises,

and contract by the week for their board and lodging: the charge for which diminishes as they go nearer the sky to roost. A public table is laid in a very handsome hall for breakfast, and for dinner, and for supper. The party sitting down together to these meals will vary in number from one to two hundred: sometimes more. The advent of each of these epochs in the day is proclaimed by an awful gong, which shakes the very window frames as it reverberates through the house, and horribly disturbs nervous foreigners. There is an ordinary for ladies, and an ordinary for gentlemen.

In our private room the cloth could not, for any earthly consideration, have been laid for dinner without a huge glass dish of cranberries in the middle of the table; and breakfast would have been no breakfast unless the principal dish were a deformed beef-steak with a great flat bone in the centre, swimming in hot butter, and sprinkled with the very blackest of all possible pepper. Our bedroom was spacious and airy, but (like every bedroom on this side of the Atlantic) very bare of furniture, having no curtains to the French bedstead or to the window. It had one unusual luxury, however, in the shape of a wardrobe of painted wood, something smaller than an English watch-box: or, if this comparison should be insufficient to convey a just idea of its dimensions, they may be estimated from the fact of my having lived for fourteen days and nights in the firm belief that it was a shower-bath.

CHAPTER IV.

AN AMERICAN RAILROAD. LOWELL AND ITS FACTORY SYSTEM.

BEFORE leaving Boston, I devoted one day to an excursion to Lowell. I assign a separate chapter to this visit; not because I am about to describe it at any great length, but because I remember it as a thing by itself, and am desirous that my readers should do the same.

I made acquaintance with an American railroad on this occasion, for the first time. As these works are pretty much alike all through the States, their general characteristics are easily described.

There are no first and second class carriages as with us; but there is a gentlemen's car and a ladies' car: the main distinction between which is, that in the first everybody smokes; and in the second, nobody does. As a black man never travels with a white one, there is also a negro car; which is a great, blundering, clumsy chest, such as Gulliver put to sea in from the kingdom of Brobdingnag. There is a great deal of jolting, a great deal of noise, a great deal of wall, not much window, a locomotive engine, a shriek, and a bell.

The cars are like shabby omnibuses, but larger: holding thirty, forty, fifty people. The seats, instead of stretching from end to end, are placed crosswise. Each seat holds two persons. There is a long row of them on each side of the caravan, a narrow passage up the middle, and a door at both ends. In the centre of the carriage there is usually a stove, fed with charcoal or anthracite coal; which is for the most part red-hot. It is insufferably close; and you see the hot air fluttering between yourself and any other object you may happen to look at, like the ghost of smoke.

In the ladies' car there are a great many gentlemen who have ladies with them. There are also a great many ladies who have nobody with them: for any lady may travel alone, from one end of the United States to the other, and be certain of the most courteous and considerate treatment everywhere. The conductor, or check-taker, or guard, or whatever he may be, wears no uniform. He walks up and down the car, and in and out of it, as his fancy dictates; leans against the door with his hands in his pockets, and stares at you, if you chance to be a stranger; or enters into conversation with the passengers about him. A great many newspapers are pulled out, and a few of them are read. Everybody talks to you, or to anybody else who hits his fancy. If you are an Englishman, he expects that that railroad is pretty much like an English railroad. If you say "No," he says "Yes?" (interrogatively), and asks in what respect they differ. You enumerate the heads of difference, one by one, and he says "Yes?" (still interrogatively) to each. Then he guesses that you don't travel faster in England; and on your replying that you do, says "Yes?" again (still interrogatively), and, it is quite evident, don't believe it. After a long pause he remarks, partly to you, and partly to the knob on the top of his stick, that "Yankees are reckoned to be considerable of a go-ahead people too;" upon which *you* say "Yes," and then *he* says "Yes" again (affirmatively this time); and, upon your looking out of window, tells you that behind that hill, and some three miles from the next station, there is a clever town in a smart lo-ca-tion, where he expects you have con-cluded to stop.

Your answer in the negative naturally leads to more questions in reference to your intended route (always pronounced rout); and wherever you are going, you invariably learn that you can't get there without immense difficulty and danger, and that all the great sights are somewhere else.

If a lady take a fancy to any male passenger's seat, the gentleman who accompanies her gives him notice of the fact, and he immediately vacates it with great politeness. Politics are much discussed; so are banks, so is cotton. Quiet people avoid the question of the Presidency, for there will be a new election in three years and a half, and party feeling runs very high: the great constitutional feature of this institution being, that directly the acrimony of the last election is over, the acrimony of the next one begins; which is an unspeakable comfort to all strong politicians and true lovers of their country: that is to say, to ninety-nine men and boys out of every ninety-nine and a quarter.

Except when a branch road joins the main one, there is seldom more than one track of rails; so that the road is very narrow, and the view, where there is a deep cutting, by no means extensive. When there is not, the character of the scenery is always the same. Mile after mile of stunted trees: some hewn down by the axe, some blown down by the wind, some half fallen and resting on their neighbours, many mere logs half hidden in the swamp, others mouldered away to spongy chips. The very soil of the earth is made up of minute fragments such as these; each pool of stagnant water has its crust of vegetable rottenness; on every side there are the boughs, and trunks, and stumps of trees, in every possible stage of decay, decomposition, and neglect. Now you emerge for a few brief minutes on an open country, glittering with some bright lake or pool, broad as many an English river, but so small here that it scarcely has a name; now catch hasty glimpses of a distant town, with its clean white houses and their cool piazzas, its prim New England church and schoolhouse; when whir-r-r-r! almost before you have seen them, comes the same dark screen: the stunted trees, the stumps, the logs, the stagnant water—all so like the last that you seem to have been transported back again by magic.

The train calls at stations in the woods, where the wild impossibility of anybody having the smallest reason to get out is only to be equalled by the apparently desperate hopelessness of there being anybody to get in. It rushes across the turnpike road, where there is no gate, no policeman, no signal; nothing but a rough wooden arch, on which is painted "When the bell rings, look out for the Locomotive." On it whirls headlong, dives through the woods again, emerges in the light, clatters over frail arches, rumbles upon the heavy ground, shoots beneath a wooden bridge which intercepts the light for a second like a wink, suddenly awakens all the slumbering echoes in the main street of a large town, and dashes on hap-hazard, pell-mell, neck or nothing, down the middle of the road. There—with mechanics working at their trades, and people leaning from their doors and windows, and boys flying kites and playing marbles, and men smoking, and women talking, and children crawling, and pigs burrowing, and unaccustomed horses plunging and rearing, close to the very rails—there—on, on, on—tears the mad dragon of an engine with its train of cars; scattering in all directions a shower of burning sparks from its wood fire; screeching, hissing, yelling, panting, until at last the thirsty monster stops beneath a covered way to drink, the people cluster round, and you have time to breathe again.

I was met at the station at Lowell by a gentleman intimately connected with the management of the factories there; and gladly putting myself under his guidance, drove off at once to that quarter of the town in which the works, the object of my visit, were situated. Although only just of age—for, if my recollection serve me, it has been a manufacturing town barely one-and-twenty years—Lowell is a large, populous, thriving place. Those indications of its youth which first attract the eye, give it a quaintness and oddity of character which, to a visitor from the old country, is amusing enough. It was a very dirty winter's day, and nothing in the whole town looked old to me, except the mud, which in some parts was almost knee deep, and might have been deposited there on the subsiding of the waters after the Deluge. In one place there was a new wooden church, which, having no steeple, and being yet unpainted, looked like an enormous packing-case without any direction upon it. In another there was a large hotel, whose walls and colonnades were so crisp, and thin, and slight, that it had exactly the appearance of being built with cards. I was careful not to draw my breath as we passed, and trembled when I saw a workman come out upon the roof, lest with one thoughtless stamp of his foot he should crush the structure beneath him, and bring it rattling down. The very river that moves the machinery in the mills (for they are all worked by water power) seems to acquire a new character from the fresh buildings of bright

red brick and painted wood among which it takes its course; and to be as light-headed, thoughtless, and brisk a young river, in its murmurings and tumblings, as one would desire to see. One would swear that every "Bakery," "Grocery," and "Bookbindery," and other kind of store took its shutters down for the first time, and started in business yesterday. The golden pestles and mortars fixed as signs upon the sun-blind frames outside the Druggists' appear to have been just turned out of the United States Mint; and when I saw a baby of some week or ten days old in a woman's arms at a street corner, I found myself unconsciously wondering where it came from: never supposing for an instant that it could have been born in such a young town as that.

There are several factories in Lowell, each of which belongs to what we should term a Company of Proprietors, but what they call in America a Corporation. I went over several of these; such as a woollen factory, a carpet factory, and a cotton factory: examined them in every part; and saw them in their ordinary working aspect, with no preparation of any kind, or departure from their ordinary every-day proceedings. I may add that I am well acquainted with our manufacturing towns in England, and have visited many mills in Manchester and elsewhere in the same manner.

I happened to arrive at the first factory just as the dinner hour was over, and the girls were returning to their work; indeed, the stairs of the mill were thronged with them as I ascended. They were all well dressed, but not, to my thinking, above their condition: for I like to see the humbler classes of society careful of their dress and appearance, and even, if they please, decorated with such little trinkets as come within the compass of their means. Supposing it confined within reasonable limits, I would always encourage this kind of pride, as a worthy element of self-respect, in any person I employed; and should no more be deterred from doing so, because some wretched female referred her fall to a love of dress, than I would allow my construction of the real intent and meaning of the Sabbath to be influenced by any warning to the well-disposed, founded on his backslidings on that particular day, which might emanate from the rather doubtful authority of a murderer in Newgate.

These girls, as I have said, were all well dressed: and that phrase necessarily includes extreme cleanliness. They had serviceable bonnets, good warm cloaks and shawls; and were not above clogs and pattens. Moreover, there were places in the mill in which they could deposit these things without injury; and there were conveniences for washing. They were healthy in appearance; many of them remarkably so, and had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden. If I had seen in one of those mills (but I did not, though I looked for something of this kind with a sharp eye) the most lisping, mincing, affected, and ridiculous young creature that my imagination could suggest, I should have thought of the careless, moping, slatternly, degraded, dull reverse (I *have* seen that), and should have been still well pleased to look upon her.

The rooms in which they worked were as well ordered as themselves. In the windows of some there were green plants, which were trained to shade the glass; in all, there was as much fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort as the nature of the occupation would possibly admit of. Out of so large a number of females, many of whom were only then just verging upon womanhood, it may be reasonably supposed that some were delicate and fragile in appearance: no doubt there were. But I solemnly declare, that from all the crowd I saw in the different factories that day, I cannot recall or separate one young face that gave me a painful impression; not one young girl whom, assuming it to be matter of necessity that she should gain her daily bread by the labour of her hands, I would have removed from those works if I had had the power.

They reside in various boarding-houses near at hand. The owners of the mills are particularly careful to allow no persons to enter upon the possession of these houses, whose characters have not undergone the most searching and thorough inquiry. Any complaint that is made against them by the boarders, or by any one else, is fully investigated; and if good ground of complaint be shown to exist against them, they are removed, and their occupation is handed over to some more deserving person. There are a few children employed in these factories, but not many. The laws of the State forbid their working more than nine months in the year, and require that they be educated during the other three. For this purpose there are schools in Lowell; and there are churches and chapels of various persuasions, in which the young women may observe that form of worship in which they have been educated.

At some distance from the factories, and on the highest and pleasantest ground in the neighbourhood, stands their hospital, or boarding-house for the sick: it is the best house in those

parts, and was built by an eminent merchant for his own residence. Like that institution at Boston, which I have before described, it is not parcelled out into wards, but is divided into convenient chambers, each of which has all the comforts of a very comfortable home. The principal medical attendant resides under the same roof; and were the patients members of his own family, they could not be better cared for, or attended with greater gentleness and consideration. The weekly charge in this establishment for each female patient is three dollars, or twelve shillings English; but no girl employed by any of the corporations is ever excluded for want of the means of payment. That they do not very often want the means may be gathered from the fact, that in July, 1841, no fewer than nine hundred and seventy-eight of these girls were depositors in the Lowell Savings Bank: the amount of whose joint savings was estimated at one hundred thousand dollars, or twenty thousand English pounds.

RAILWAY DIALOGUE.

I am now going to state three facts, which will startle a large class of readers on this side of the Atlantic very much.

Firstly, there is a joint-stock piano in a great many of the boarding-houses. Secondly, nearly all these young ladies subscribe to circulating libraries. Thirdly, they have got up among themselves a periodical called THE LOWELL OFFERING, "a repository of original articles, written exclusively by females actively employed in the mills,"—which is duly printed, published, and sold; and whereof I brought away from Lowell four hundred good solid pages, which I have read from beginning to end.

The large class of readers, startled by these facts, will exclaim, with one voice, "How very preposterous!" On my deferentially inquiring why, they will answer, "These things are above their station." In reply to that objection, I would beg to ask what their station is.

It is their station to work. And they *do* work. They labour in these mills, upon an

average, twelve hours a day, which is unquestionably work, and pretty tight work too. Perhaps it is above their station to indulge in such amusements on any terms. Are we quite sure that we in England have not formed our ideas of the "station" of working-people from accustoming ourselves to the contemplation of that class as they are, and not as they might be? I think that, if we examine our own feelings, we shall find that the pianos, and the circulating libraries, and even the Lowell Offering, startle us by their novelty, and not by their bearing upon any abstract question of right or wrong.

For myself, I know no station in which, the occupation of to-day cheerfully done and the occupation of to-morrow cheerfully looked to, any one of these pursuits is not most humanising and laudable. I know no station which is rendered more endurable to the person in it, or more safe to the person out of it, by having ignorance for its associate. I know no station which has a right to monopolise the means of mutual instruction, improvement, and rational entertainment; or which has ever continued to be a station very long after seeking to do so.

Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labours of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals. It is pleasant to find that many of its Tales are of the Mills, and of those who work in them; that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence. A strong feeling for the beauties of nature, as displayed in the solitudes the writers have left at home, breathes through its pages like wholesome village air; and though a circulating library is a favourable school for the study of such topics, it has very scant allusion to fine clothes, fine marriages, fine houses, or fine life. Some persons might object to the papers being signed occasionally with rather fine names, but this is an American fashion. One of the provinces of the State Legislature of Massachusetts is to alter ugly names into pretty ones, as the children improve upon the tastes of their parents. These changes costing little or nothing, scores of Mary Annes are solemnly converted into Bevelinas every session.

It is said that on the occasion of a visit from General Jackson or General Harrison to this town (I forget which, but it is not to the purpose), he walked through three miles and a half of these young ladies, all dressed out with parasols and silk stockings. But, as I am not aware that any worse consequence ensued than a sudden looking-up of all the parasols and silk stockings in the market; and perhaps the Bankruptcy of some speculative New Englander who bought them all up at any price, in expectation of a demand that never came; I set no great store by the circumstance.

In this brief account of Lowell, and inadequate expression of the gratification it yielded me, and cannot fail to afford to any foreigner to whom the condition of such people at home is a subject of interest and anxious speculation, I have carefully abstained from drawing a comparison between these factories and those of our own land. Many of the circumstances whose strong influence has been at work for years in our manufacturing towns have not arisen here; and there is no manufacturing population in Lowell, so to speak: for these girls (often the daughters of small farmers) come from other States, remain a few years in the mills, and then go home for good.

The contrast would be a strong one, for it would be between the Good and Evil, the living light and deepest shadow. I abstain from it, because I deem it just to do so. But I only the more earnestly adjure all those whose eyes may rest on these pages, to pause and reflect upon the difference between this town and those great haunts of desperate misery: to call to mind, if they can in the midst of party strife and squabble, the efforts that must be made to purge them of their suffering and danger: and last, and foremost, to remember how the precious Time is rushing by.

I returned at night by the same railroad, and in the same kind of car. One of the passengers being exceedingly anxious to expound at great length to my companion (not to me, of course) the true principles on which books of travel in America should be written by Englishmen, I feigned to fall asleep. But glancing all the way out at window from the corners of my eyes, I found abundance of entertainment for the rest of the ride in watching the effects of the wood fire, which had been invisible in the morning, but were now brought out in full relief by the darkness: for we were travelling in a whirlwind of bright sparks, which showered about us like a storm of fiery snow.

CHAPTER V.

WORCESTER. THE CONNECTICUT RIVER. HARTFORD. NEW HAVEN TO NEW YORK.

LEAVING Boston on the afternoon of Saturday, the fifth of February, we proceeded by another railroad to Worcester: a pretty New England town, where we had arranged to remain under the hospitable roof of the Governor of the State until Monday morning.

These towns and cities of New England (many of which would be villages in Old England) are as favourable specimens of rural America as their people are of rural Americans. The well-trimmed lawns and green meadows of home are not there; and the grass, compared with our ornamental plots and pastures, is rank, and rough, and wild: but delicate slopes of land, gently-swelling hills, wooded valleys, and slender streams abound. Every little colony of houses has its church and school-house peeping from among the white roofs and shady trees; every house is the whitest of the white; every Venetian blind the greenest of the green; every fine day's sky the bluest of the blue. A sharp dry wind and a slight frost had so hardened the roads when we alighted at Worcester, that their furrowed tracks were like ridges of granite. There was the usual aspect of newness on every object, of course. All the buildings looked as if they had been built and painted that morning, and could be taken down on Monday with very little trouble. In the keen evening air, every sharp outline looked a hundred times sharper than ever. The clean cardboard colonnades had no more perspective than a Chinese bridge on a teacup, and appeared equally well calculated for use. The razor-like edges of the detached cottages seemed to cut the very wind as it whistled against them, and to send it smarting on its way with a shriller cry than before. Those slightly-built wooden dwellings, behind which the sun was setting with a brilliant lustre, could be so looked through and through, that the idea of any inhabitant being able to hide himself from the public gaze, or to have any secrets from the public eye, was not entertainable for a moment. Even where a blazing fire shone through the uncurtained windows of some distant house, it had the air of being newly lighted, and of lacking warmth; and instead of awakening thoughts of a snug chamber, bright with faces that first saw the light round that same hearth, and ruddy with warm hangings, it came upon one suggestive of the smell of new mortar and damp walls.

So I thought, at least, that evening. Next morning, when the sun was shining brightly, and the clear church bells were ringing, and sedate people in their best clothes enlivened the pathway near at hand, and dotted the distant thread of road, there was a pleasant Sabbath peacefulness on everything which it was good to feel. It would have been the better for an old church; better still for some old graves; but as it was, a wholesome repose and tranquillity pervaded the scene, which, after the restless ocean and the hurried city, had a doubly grateful influence on the spirits.

We went on next morning, still by railroad, to Springfield. From that place to Hartford, whither we were bound, is a distance of only five-and-twenty miles, but at that time of the year the roads were so bad that the journey would probably have occupied ten or twelve hours. Fortunately, however, the winter having been unusually mild, the Connecticut River was "open," or, in other words, not frozen. The captain of a small steamboat was going to make his first trip for the season that day (the second February trip, I believe, within the memory of man), and only waited for us to go on board. Accordingly, we went on board with as little delay as might be. He was as good as his word, and started directly.

It certainly was not called a small steamboat without reason. I omitted to ask the question, but I should think it must have been of about half a pony power. Mr. Paap, the celebrated Dwarf, might have lived and died happily in the cabin, which was fitted with common sash-windows like an ordinary dwelling-house. These windows had bright red curtains, too, hung on slack strings across the lower panes; so that it looked like the parlour of a Lilliputian public-house, which had got afloat in a flood or some other water accident, and was drifting nobody knew where. But even in this chamber there was a rocking-chair. It would be impossible to get on anywhere, in America, without a rocking-chair.

I am afraid to tell how many feet short this vessel was, or how many feet narrow; to apply the words length and width to such measurement would be a contradiction in terms. But I may state that we all kept the middle of the deck, lest the boat should unexpectedly tip over; and that the machinery, by some surprising process of condensation, worked between it and the keel: the whole forming a warm sandwich about three feet thick.

It rained all day, as I once thought it never did rain anywhere but in the Highlands of Scotland. The river was full of floating blocks of ice, which were constantly crunching and cracking under us; and the depth of water, in the course we took to avoid the larger masses, carried down the middle of the river by the current, did not exceed a few inches. Nevertheless, we moved onward dexterously; and, being well wrapped up, bade defiance to the weather, and enjoyed the journey. The Connecticut River is a fine stream; and the banks in summer-time are, I have no doubt, beautiful: at all events, I was told so by a young lady in the cabin; and she should be a judge of beauty, if the possession of a quality include the appreciation of it, for a more beautiful creature I never looked upon.

After two hours and a half of this odd travelling (including a stoppage at a small town, where we were saluted by a gun considerably bigger than our own chimney), we reached Hartford, and straightway repaired to an extremely comfortable hotel: except, as usual, in the article of bedrooms, which, in almost every place we visited, were very conducive to early rising.

We tarried here four days. The town is beautifully situated in a basin of green hills; the soil is rich, well wooded, and carefully improved. It is the seat of the local legislature of Connecticut, which sage body enacted, in bygone times, the renowned code of "Blue Laws," in virtue whereof, among other enlightened provisions, any citizen who could be proved to have kissed his wife on Sunday was punishable, I believe, with the stocks. Too much of the old Puritan spirit exists in these parts to the present hour; but its influence has not tended, that I know, to make the people less hard in their bargains, or more equal in their dealings. As I never heard of its working that effect anywhere else, I infer that it never will here. Indeed, I am accustomed, with reference to great professions and severe faces, to judge of the goods of the other world pretty much as I judge of the goods of this; and whenever I see a dealer in such commodities with too great a display of them in his window, I doubt the quality of the article within.

In Hartford stands the famous oak in which the charter of King Charles was hidden. It is now enclosed in a gentleman's garden. In the State House is the charter itself. I found the courts of law here just the same as at Boston; the public Institutions almost as good. The Insane Asylum is admirably conducted, and so is the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.

I very much questioned within myself, as I walked through the Insane Asylum, whether I should have known the attendants from the patients, but for the few words which passed between the former and the Doctor, in reference to the persons under their charge. Of course I limit this remark merely to their looks; for the conversation of the mad people was mad enough.

There was one little prim old lady, of very smiling and good-humoured appearance, who came sidling up to me from the end of a long passage, and, with a curtsy of inexpressible condescension, propounded this unaccountable inquiry:

"Does Pontefract still flourish, sir, upon the soil of England?"

"He does, ma'am," I rejoined.

"When you last saw him, sir, he was——"

"Well, ma'am," said I, "extremely well. He begged me to present his compliments. I never saw him looking better."

At this the old lady was very much delighted. After glancing at me for a moment, as if to be quite sure that I was serious in my respectful air, she sidled back some paces; sidled forward again; made a sudden skip (at which I precipitately retreated a step or two); and said:

"*I* am an antediluvian, sir."

I thought the best thing to say was, that I had suspected as much from the first. Therefore I said so.

"It is an extremely proud and pleasant thing, sir, to be an antediluvian," said the old lady.

"I should think it was, ma'am," I rejoined.

The old lady kissed her hand, gave another skip, smirked, and sidled down the gallery in a most extraordinary manner, and ambled gracefully into her own bedchamber.

In another part of the building there was a male patient in bed; very much flushed and heated.

"Well!" said he, starting up, and pulling off his nightcap: "it's all settled at last. I have arranged it with Queen Victoria."

"Arranged what?" asked the Doctor.

"Why, that business," passing his hand wearily across his forehead, "about the siege of New York."

"Oh!" said I, like a man suddenly enlightened. For he looked at me for an answer.

"Yes. Every house without a signal will be fired upon by the British troops. No harm will be done to the others. No harm at all. Those that want to be safe must hoist flags. That's all they'll have to do. They must hoist flags."

Even while he was speaking he seemed, I

thought, to have some faint idea that his talk was incoherent. Directly he had said these words, he lay down again; gave a kind of groan; and covered his hot head with the blankets.

There was another: a young man whose madness was love and music. After playing on the accordion a march he had composed, he was very anxious that I should walk into his chamber, which I immediately did.

By way of being very knowing, and humouring him to the top of his bent, I went to the window, which commanded a beautiful prospect, and remarked, with an address upon which I greatly plumed myself:

"What a delicious country you have about these lodgings of yours!"

"Poh!" said he, moving his fingers carelessly over the notes of his instrument. "*Well enough for such an Institution as this!*"

I don't think I was ever so taken aback in all my life.

"I come here just for a whim," he said coolly. "That's all."

"Oh! That's all!" said I.

"Yes. That's all. The Doctor's a smart man. He quite enters into it. It's a joke of mine. I like it for a time. You needn't mention it, but I think I shall go out next Tuesday!"

I assured him that I would consider our interview perfectly confidential: and rejoined the Doctor. As we were passing through a gallery on our way out, a well-dressed lady, of quiet and composed manners, came up, and proffering a slip of paper and a pen, begged that I would oblige her with an autograph. I complied, and we parted.

"I think I remember having had a few interviews like that with ladies out of doors. I hope *she* is not mad?"

"Yes."

"On what subject? Autographs?"

"No. She hears voices in the air."

"Well!" thought I, "it would be well if we could shut up a few false prophets of these later times, who have professed to do the same; and I should like to try the experiment on a Mormonist or two to begin with."

In this place there is the best Gaol for untried offenders in the world. There is also a very well-ordered State prison, arranged upon the same plan as that at Boston, except that here there is always a sentry on the wall with a loaded gun. It contained at that time about two hundred prisoners. A spot was shown me in the sleeping ward, where a watchman was murdered some years since in the dead of night, in a desperate attempt to escape made by a prisoner who had broken from his cell. A woman, too, was pointed out to me, who, for the murder of her husband, had been a close prisoner for sixteen years.

"Do you think," I asked of my conductor, "that after so very long an imprisonment, she has any thought or hope of ever regaining her liberty?"

"Oh dear yes!" he answered. "To be sure she has."

"She has no chance of obtaining it, I suppose?"

"Well, I don't know:" which, by-the-bye, is a national answer. "Her friends mistrust her."

"What have *they* to do with it?" I naturally inquired.

"Well, they won't petition."

"But if they did, they couldn't get her out, I suppose?"

"Well, not the first time, perhaps, nor yet the second, but tiring and wearying for a few years might do it."

"Does that ever do it?"

"Why, yes, that'll do it sometimes. Political friends 'll do it sometimes. It's pretty often done, one way or another."

I shall always entertain a very pleasant and grateful recollection of Hartford. It is a lovely place, and I had many friends there, whom I never can remember with indifference. We left it with no little regret on the evening of Friday, the 11th, and travelled that night by railroad to New Haven. Upon the way, the guard and I were formally introduced to each other (as we usually were on such occasions), and exchanged a variety of small-talk. We reached New Haven at about eight o'clock, after a journey of three hours, and put up for the night at the best inn.

New Haven, known also as the City of Elms, is a fine town. Many of its streets (as its *alias* sufficiently imports) are planted with rows of grand old elm-trees; and the same natural ornaments surround Yale College, an establishment of considerable eminence and reputation. The various departments of this Institution are erected in a kind of park or common in the middle of the town, where they are dimly visible among the shadowing trees. The effect is very like that of an old cathedral yard in England; and, when their branches are in full leaf, must be extremely picturesque. Even in the wintertime, these groups of well-grown trees, clustering among the busy streets and houses of a thriving city, have a very quaint appearance: seeming to bring about a kind of compromise between town

and country; as if each had met the other half-way, and shaken hands upon it; which is at once novel and pleasant.

After a night's rest, we rose early, and in good time went down to the wharf, and on board the packet New York *for* New York. This was the first American steamboat of any size that I had seen; and certainly, to an English eye, it was infinitely less like a steamboat than a huge floating bath. I could hardly persuade myself, indeed, but that the bathing establishment off Westminster Bridge, which I left a baby, had suddenly grown to an enormous size; run away from home; and set up in foreign parts as a steamer. Being in America, too, which our vagabonds do so particularly favour, it seemed the more probable.

The great difference in appearance between these packets and ours is, that there is so much of them out of the water: the main-deck being enclosed on all sides, and filled with casks and goods, like any second or third floor in a stack of warehouses; and the promenade or hurricane deck being atop of that again. A part of the machinery is always above this deck; where the connecting-rod, in a strong and lofty frame, is seen working away like an iron top-sawyer. There is seldom any mast or tackle: nothing aloft but two tall black chimneys. The man at the helm is shut up in a little house in the fore part of the boat (the wheel being connected with the rudder by iron chains, working the whole length of the deck); and the passengers, unless the weather be very fine indeed, usually congregate below. Directly you have left the wharf, all the life, and stir, and bustle of a packet cease. You wonder for a long time how she goes on, for there seems to be nobody in charge of her; and when another of these dull machines comes splashing by, you feel quite indignant with it, as a sullen, cumbrous, ungraceful, unshiplike leviathan: quite forgetting that the vessel you are on board of is its very counterpart.

There is always a clerk's office on the lower deck, where you pay your fare; a ladies' cabin; baggage and stowage rooms; engineer's room; and, in short, a great variety of perplexities which render the discovery of the gentlemen's cabin a matter of some difficulty. It often occupies the whole length of the boat (as it did in this case), and has three or four tiers of berths on each side. When I first descended into the cabin of the New York, it looked, in my unaccustomed eyes, about as long as the Burlington Arcade.

The Sound, which has to be crossed on this passage, is not always a very safe or pleasant navigation, and has been the scene of some unfortunate accidents. It was a wet morning, and very misty, and we soon lost sight of land. The day was calm, however, and brightened towards noon. After exhausting (with good help from a friend) the larder, and the stock of bottled beer, I lay down to sleep: being very much tired with the fatigues of yesterday. But I awoke from my nap in time to hurry up, and see Hell Gate, the Hog's Back, the Frying Pan, and other notorious localities, attractive to all readers of famous Diedrich Knickerbocker's History. We were now in a narrow channel, with sloping banks on either side, besprinkled with pleasant villas, and made refreshing to the sight by turf and trees. Soon we shot, in quick succession, past a lighthouse: a madhouse (how the lunatics flung up their caps and roared in sympathy with the headlong engine and the driving tide!); a gaol; and other buildings: and so emerged into a noble bay, whose waters sparkled in the now cloudless sunshine like Nature's eyes turned up to Heaven.

Then there lay stretched out before us, to the right, confused heaps of buildings, with here and there a spire or steeple, looking down upon the herd below; and here and there, again, a cloud of lazy smoke; and in the foreground a forest of ships' masts, cheery with flapping sails and waving flags. Crossing from among them to the opposite shore, were steam ferry-boats laden with people, coaches, horses, waggons, baskets, boxes; crossed and recrossed by other ferry-boats: all travelling to and fro: and never idle. Stately among these restless Insects were two or three large ships, moving with slow majestic pace, as creatures of a prouder kind, disdainful of their puny journeys, and making for the broad sea. Beyond were shining heights, and islands in the glancing river, and a distance scarcely less blue and bright than the sky it seemed to meet. The city's hum and buzz, the clinking of capstans, the ringing of bells, the barking of dogs, the clattering of wheels, tingled in the listening ear. All of which life and stir, coming across the stirring water, caught new life and animation from its free companionship; and, sympathising with its buoyant spirits, glistened as it seemed in sport upon its surface, and hemmed the vessel round, and plashed the water high about her sides, and, floating her gallantly into the dock, flew off again to welcome other comers, and speed before them to the busy port.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW YORK.

THE beautiful metropolis of America is by no means so clean a city as Boston, but many of its streets have the same characteristics; except that the houses are not quite so fresh-coloured, the sign-boards are not quite so gaudy, the gilded letters not quite so golden, the bricks not quite so red, the stone not quite so white, the blinds and area railings not quite so green, the knobs and plates upon the street-doors not quite so bright and twinkling. There are many by-streets, almost as neutral in clean colours, and positive in dirty ones, as by-streets in London; and there is one quarter, commonly called the Five Points, which, in respect of filth and wretchedness, may be safely backed against Seven Dials, or any other part of famed St. Giles's.

The great promenade and thoroughfare, as most people know, is Broadway; a wide and bustling street, which, from the Battery Gardens to its opposite termination in a country road, may be four miles long. Shall we sit down in an upper floor of the Carlton House Hotel (situated in the best part of this main artery of New York), and, when we are tired of looking down upon the life below, sally forth, arm-in-arm, and mingle with the stream?

Warm weather! The sun strikes upon our heads at this open window, as though its rays were concentrated through a burning-glass; but the day is in its zenith, and the season an unusual one. Was there ever such a sunny street as this Broadway? The pavement stones are polished with the tread of feet until they shine again; the red bricks of the houses might be yet in the dry, hot kilns; and the roofs of those omnibuses look as though, if water were poured on them, they would hiss and smoke, and smell like half-quenched fires. No stint of omnibuses here! Half-a-dozen have gone by within as many minutes. Plenty of hackney cabs and coaches, too; gigs, phaetons, large-wheeled tilburies, and private carriages—rather of a clumsy make, and not very different from the public vehicles, but built for the heavy roads beyond the city pavement. Negro coachmen and white; in straw hats, black hats, white hats, glazed caps, fur caps; in coats of drab, black, brown, green, blue, nankeen, striped jean and linen; and there, in that one instance (look while it passes, or it will be too late), in suits of livery. Some Southern republican that, who puts his blacks in uniform, and swells with Sultan pomp and power. Yonder, where that phaeton with the well-clipped pair of greys has stopped—standing at their heads now—is a Yorkshire groom, who has not been very long in these parts, and looks sorrowfully round for a companion pair of top-boots, which he may traverse the city half a year without meeting. Heaven save the ladies, how they dress! We have seen more colours in these ten minutes than we should have seen elsewhere in as many days. What various parasols! what rainbow silks and satins! what pinking of thin stockings, and pinching of thin shoes, and fluttering of ribbons and silk tassels, and display of rich cloaks with gaudy hoods and linings! The young gentlemen are fond, you see, of turning down their shirt collars and cultivating their whiskers, especially under the chin; but they cannot approach the ladies in their dress or bearing, being, to say the truth, humanity of quite another sort. Byrons of the desk and counter, pass on, and let us see what kind of men those are behind ye: those two labourers in holiday clothes, of whom one carries in his hand a crumpled scrap of paper from which he tries to spell out a hard name, while the other looks about for it on all the doors and windows.

Irishmen both! You might know them, if they were masked, by their long-tailed blue coats and bright buttons, and their drab trousers, which they wear like men well used to working dresses, who are easy in no others. It would be hard to keep your model republics going without the countrymen and countrywomen of those two labourers. For who else would dig, and delve, and drudge, and do domestic work, and make canals and roads, and execute great lines of Internal Improvement? Irishmen both, and sorely puzzled, too, to find out what they seek. Let us go down, and help them, for the love of home, and that spirit of liberty which admits of honest service to honest men, and honest work for honest bread, no matter what it be.

That's well! We have got at the right address at last, though it is written in strange characters truly, and might have been scrawled with the blunt handle of the spade the writer better knows the use of than a pen. Their way lies yonder, but what business takes them there? They carry savings: to hoard up? No. They are brothers, those men. One crossed the sea alone, and working very hard for one half-year, and living harder, saved funds enough to bring the other out. That done, they worked together side by side, contentedly sharing hard labour and hard living for another term, and then their sisters came, and then another brother, and

lastly, their old mother. And what now? Why, the poor old crone is restless in a strange land, and yearns to lay her bones, she says, among her people in the old graveyard at home: and so they go to pay her passage back: and God help her and them, and every simple heart, and all who turn to the Jerusalem of their younger days, and have an altar-fire upon the cold hearth of their fathers!

This narrow thoroughfare, baking and blistering in the sun, is Wall Street: the Stock Exchange, and Lombard Street of New York. Many a rapid fortune has been made in this street, and many a no less rapid ruin. Some of these very merchants whom you see hanging about here now, have locked up money in their strong-boxes, like the man in the Arabian Nights, and opening them again, have found but withered leaves. Below, here by the waterside, where the bowsprits of ships stretch across the footway, and almost thrust themselves into the windows, lie the noble American vessels which have made their Packet Service the finest in the world. They have brought hither the foreigners who abound in all the streets: not, perhaps, that there are more here than in other commercial cities; but elsewhere they have particular haunts, and you must find them out; here they pervade the town.

We must cross the Broadway again; gaining some refreshment from the heat in the sight of the great blocks of clean ice which are being carried into shops and bar-rooms; and the pine-apples and water-melons profusely displayed for sale. Fine streets of spacious houses here, you see!—Wall Street has furnished and dismantled many of them very often—and here a deep green leafy square. Be sure that is a hospitable house, with inmates to be affectionately remembered always, where they have the open door and pretty show of plants within, and where the child with laughing eyes is peeping out of window at the little dog below. You wonder what may be the use of this tall flagstaff in the by-street, with something like Liberty's head-dress on its top: so do I.. But there is a passion for tall flagstaffs hereabout, and you may see its twin brother in five minutes, if you have a mind.

Again across Broadway, and so—passing from the many-coloured crowd and glittering shops—into another long main street, the Bowery. A rail-road yonder, see, where two stout horses trot along, drawing a score or two of people and a great wooden ark with ease. The stores are poorer here, the passengers less gay. Clothes ready made, and meat ready cooked, are to be bought in these parts; and the lively whirl of carriages is exchanged for the deep rumble of carts and waggons. These signs which are so plentiful, in shape like river buoys, or small balloons, hoisted by cords to poles, and dangling there, announce, as you may see by looking up, "OYSTERS IN EVERY STYLE." They tempt the hungry most at night, for then dull candles, glimmering inside, illuminate these dainty words, and make the mouths of idlers water as they read and linger.

What is this dismal-fronted pile of bastard Egyptian, like an enchanter's palace in a melodrama?—A famous prison, called The Tombs. Shall we go in?

So. A long, narrow, lofty building, stove-heated as usual, with four galleries, one above the other, going round it, and communicating by stairs. Between the two sides of each gallery, and in its centre, a bridge, for the greater convenience of crossing. On each of these bridges sits a man: dozing or reading, or talking to an idle companion. On each tier are two opposite rows of small iron doors. They look like furnace doors, but are cold and black, as though the fires within had all gone out. Some two or three are open, and women, with drooping heads bent down, are talking to the inmates. The whole is lighted by a skylight, but it is fast closed; and from the roof there dangle, limp and drooping, two useless wind-sails.

A man with keys appears, to show us round. A good-looking fellow, and, in his way, civil and obliging.

"Are those black doors the cells?"

"Yes."

"Are they all full?"

"Well, they're pretty nigh full, and that's a fact, and no two ways about it."

"Those at the bottom are unwholesome, surely?"

"Why, we *do* only put coloured people in 'em. That's the truth."

"When do the prisoners take exercise?"

"Well, they do without it pretty much."

"Do they never walk in the yard?"

"Considerable seldom."

"Sometimes, I suppose?"

"Well, it's rare they do. They keep pretty bright without it."

"But suppose a man were here for a twelvemonth. I know this is only a prison for criminals who are charged with grave offences, while they are awaiting their trial, or are under remand, but the law here affords criminals many means of delay. What with motions for new trial, and in arrest of judgment, and what not, a

prisoner might be here for twelve months, I take it, might he not?"

"Well, I guess he might."

"Do you mean to say that in all that time he would never come out at that little iron door for exercise?"

"He might walk some, perhaps—not much."

"Will you open one of the doors?"

"All, if you like."

The fastenings jar and rattle, and one of the doors turns slowly on its hinges. Let us look in. A small bare cell, into which the light enters through a high chink in the wall. There is a rude means of washing, a table, and a bedstead. Upon the latter sits a man of sixty; reading. He looks up for a moment; gives an impatient dogged shake; and fixes his eyes upon his book again. As we withdrew our heads, the door closes on him, and is fastened as before. This man has murdered his wife, and will probably be hanged.

"How long has he been here?"

"A month."

"When will he be tried?"

"Next term."

"When is that?"

"Next month."

"In England, if a man be under sentence of death even, he has air and exercise at certain periods of the day."

"Possible."

With what stupendous and untranslatable coolness he says this, and how loungingly he leads on to the women's side: making, as he goes, a kind of iron castanet of the key and the stair-rail!

Each cell door on this side has a square aperture in it. Some of the women peep anxiously through it at the sound of footsteps; others shrink away in shame.—For what offence can that lonely child, of ten or twelve years old, be shut up here? Oh! that boy? He is the son of a prisoner we saw just now; is a witness against his father; and is detained here for safe keeping until the trial; that's all.

But it is a dreadful place for the child to pass the long days and nights in. This is rather hard treatment for a young witness, is it not?—What says our conductor?

"Well, it an't a very rowdy life, and *that's* a fact!"

Again he clinks his metal castanet, and leads us leisurely away. I have a question to ask him as we go.

"Pray, why do they call this place The Tombs?"

"Well, it's the cant name."

"I know it is. Why?"

"Some suicides happened here when it was first built. I expect it come about from that."

"I saw, just now, that that man's clothes were scattered about the floor of his cell. Don't you oblige the prisoners to be orderly, and put such things away?"

"Where should they put 'em?"

"Not on the ground, surely. What do you say to hanging them up?"

He stops and looks round to emphasise his answer:

"Why, I say that's just it. When they had hooks they *would* hang themselves, so they're taken out of every cell, and there's only the marks left where they used to be!"

The prison yard, in which he pauses now, has been the scene of terrible performances. Into this narrow, grave-like place men are brought out to die. The wretched creature stands beneath the gibbet on the ground; the rope about his neck; and when the sign is given, a weight at its other end comes running down, and swings him up into the air—a corpse.

The law requires that there be present at this dismal spectacle the judge, the jury, and citizens to the amount of twenty-five. From the community it is hidden. To the dissolute and bad, the thing remains a frightful mystery. Between the criminal and them, the prison wall is interposed as a thick gloomy veil. It is the curtain to his bed of death, his winding-sheet and grave. From him it shuts out life, and all the motives to unrepenting hardihood in that last hour, which its mere sight and presence is often all-sufficient to sustain. There are no bold eyes to make him bold; no ruffians to uphold a ruffian's name before. All beyond the pitiless stone wall is unknown space.

Let us go forth again into the cheerful streets.

Once more in Broadway! Here are the same ladies in bright colours, walking to and fro, in pairs and singly; yonder the very same light blue parasol which passed and repassed the hotel window twenty times while we were sitting there. We are going to cross here. Take care of the pigs. Two portly sows are trotting up behind this carriage, and a select party of half-a-dozen gentlemen hogs have just now turned the corner.

Here is a solitary swine lounging homeward by himself. He has only one ear; having parted with the other to vagrant dogs in the course of his city rambles. But he gets on very well without it; and leads a roving, gentlemanly, vagabond kind of life, somewhat answering to that of our club men at home. He leaves his

lodgings every morning at a certain hour, throws himself upon the town, gets through his day in some manner quite satisfactory to himself, and regularly appears at the door of his own house again at night, like the mysterious master of Gil Blas. He is a free-and-easy, careless, indifferent kind of pig, having a very large acquaintance among other pigs of the same character, whom he rather knows by sight than conversation, as he seldom troubles himself to stop and exchange civilities, but goes grunting down the kennel, turning up the news and small-talk of the city in the shape of cabbage-stalks and offal, and bearing no tails but his own: which is a very short one, for his old enemies, the dogs, have been at that too, and have left him hardly enough to swear by. He is in every respect a republican pig, going wherever he pleases, and mingling with the best society, on an equal, if not superior footing, for every one makes way when he appears, and the haughtiest give him the wall, if he prefer it. He is a great philosopher, and seldom moved, unless by the dogs before mentioned. Sometimes, indeed, you may see his small eye twinkling on a slaughtered friend, whose carcase garnishes a butcher's door-post, but he grunts out, "Such is life: all flesh is pork!" buries his nose in the mire again, and waddles down the gutter: comforting himself with the reflection that there is one snout the less to anticipate stray cabbage-stalks, at any rate.

They are the city scavengers, these pigs. Ugly brutes they are; having, for the most part, scanty, brown backs, like the lids of old horse-hair trunks: spotted with unwholesome black blotches. They have long, gaunt legs, too, and such peaked snouts, that if one of them could be persuaded to sit for his profile, nobody would recognise it for a pig's likeness. They are never attended upon, or fed, or driven, or caught, but are thrown upon their own resources in early life, and become preternaturally knowing in consequence. Every pig knows where he lives, much better than anybody could tell him. At this hour, just as evening is closing in, you will see them roaming towards bed by scores, eating their way to the last. Occasionally, some youth among them who has over-eaten himself, or has been much worried by dogs, trots shrinkingly homeward, like a prodigal son; but this is a rare case: perfect self-possession and self-reliance, and immovable composure, being their foremost attributes.

The streets and shops are lighted now; and as the eye travels down the long thoroughfare, dotted with bright jets of gas, it is reminded of Oxford Street or Piccadilly. Here and there a flight of broad stone cellar steps appears, and a painted lamp directs you to the Bowling Saloon, or Ten-Pin alley: Ten-Pins being a game of mingled chance and skill, invented when the legislature passed an act forbidding Nine-Pins. At other downward flights of steps are other lamps, marking the whereabouts of oyster cellars —pleasant retreats, say I: not only by reason of their wonderful cookery of oysters, pretty nigh as large as cheese-plates, (or for thy dear sake, heartiest of Greek Professors!) but because, of all kinds of eaters of fish, or flesh, or fowl, in these latitudes, the swallowers of oysters alone are not gregarious; but subduing themselves, as it were, to the nature of what they work in, and copying the coyness of the thing they eat, do sit apart in curtained boxes, and consort by twos, not by two hundreds.

But how quiet the streets are! Are there no itinerant bands: no wind or stringed instruments? No, not one. By day, are there no Punches, Fantoccini, Dancing Dogs, Jugglers, Conjurers, Orchestrinas, or even Barrel-organs? No, not one. Yes, I remember one. One barrel-organ and a dancing monkey—sportive by nature, but fast fading into a dull, lumpish monkey, of the Utilitarian school. Beyond that, nothing lively; no, not so much as a white mouse in a twirling cage.

Are there no amusements? Yes, there is a lecture-room across the way, from which that glare of light proceeds, and there may be evening service for the ladies thrice a week, or oftener. For the young gentlemen there is the counting-house, the store, the bar-room; the latter, as you may see through these windows, pretty full. Hark! to the clinking sound of hammers breaking lumps of ice, and to the cool gurgling of the pounded bits, as, in the process of mixing, they are poured from glass to glass! No amusements? What are these suckers of cigars and swallowers of strong drinks, whose hats and legs we see in every possible variety of twist, doing, but amusing themselves? What are the fifty newspapers, which those precocious urchins are bawling down the street, and which are kept filed within, what are they but amusements? Not vapid, waterish amusements, but good strong stuff; dealing in round abuse and blackguard names; pulling off the roofs of private houses, as the Halting Devil did in Spain; pimping and pandering for all degrees of vicious taste, and gorging with coined lies the most voracious maw; imputing to every man in public life the coarsest and the vilest motives; scaring away from the stabbed and prostrate

body politic every Samaritan of clear conscience and good deeds; and setting on, with yell and whistle, and the clapping of foul hands, the vilest vermin and worst birds of prey.—No amusements!

Let us go on again; and passing this wilderness of an hotel with stores about its base, like some Continental theatre, or the London Opera House shorn of its colonnade, plunge into the Five Points. But it is needful, first, that we take as our escort these two heads of the police, whom you would know for sharp and well-trained officers if you met them in the Great Desert. So true it is that certain pursuits, wherever carried on, will stamp men with the same character. These two might have been begotten, born, and bred in Bow Street.

We have seen no beggars in the streets by night or day; but of other kinds of strollers plenty. Poverty, wretchedness, and vice are rife enough where we are going now.

This is the place, these narrow ways, diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruits here as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home, and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays. Many of those pigs live here. Do they ever wonder why their masters walk upright in lieu of going on all-fours? and why they talk instead of grunting?

So far, nearly every house is a low tavern; and on the bar-room walls are coloured prints of Washington, and Queen Victoria of England, and the American Eagle. Among the pigeon-holes that hold the bottles are pieces of plate glass and coloured paper, for there is, in some sort, a taste for decoration even here. And, as seamen frequent these haunts, there are maritime pictures by the dozen: of partings between sailors and their lady loves, portraits of William of the ballad, and his Black-Eyed Susan; of Will Watch, the Bold Smuggler; of Paul Jones the Pirate, and the like: on which the painted eyes of Queen Victoria, and of Washington to boot, rest in as strange companionship as on most of the scenes that are enacted in their wondering presence.

What place is this, to which the squalid street conducts us? A kind of square of leprous houses, some of which are attainable only by crazy wooden stairs without. What lies beyond this tottering flight of steps, that creak beneath our tread?—A miserable room, lighted by one dim candle, and destitute of all comfort, save that which may be hidden in a wretched bed. Beside it sits a man: his elbows on his knees: his forehead hidden in his hands. "What ails that man?" asks the foremost officer. "Fever," he sullenly replies, without looking up. Conceive the fancies of a fevered brain in such a place as this!

Ascend these pitch-dark stairs, heedful of a false footing on the trembling boards, and grope your way with me into this wolfish den, where neither ray of light nor breath of air appears to come. A negro lad, startled from his sleep by the officer's voice—he knows it well—but comforted by his assurance that he has not come on business, officiously bestirs himself to light a candle. The match flickers for a moment, and shows great mounds of dusky rags upon the ground; then dies away and leaves a denser darkness than before, if there can be degrees in such extremes. He stumbles down the stairs, and presently comes back, shading a flaring taper with his hand. Then the mounds of rags are seen to be astir, and rise slowly up, and the floor is covered with heaps of negro women, waking from their sleep: their white teeth chattering, and their bright eyes glistening and winking on all sides with surprise and fear, like the countless repetition of one astonished African face in some strange mirror.

Mount up these other stairs with no less caution (there are traps and pitfalls here for those who are not so well escorted as ourselves) into the housetop; where the bare beams and rafters meet overhead, and calm night looks down through the crevices in the roof. Open the door of one of these cramped hutches full of sleeping negroes. Pah! They have a charcoal fire within; there is a smell of singeing clothes, or flesh, so close they gather round the brazier; and vapours issue forth that blind and suffocate. From every corner, as you glance about you in these dark retreats, some figure crawls half awakened, as if the judgment hour were near at hand, and every obscene grave were giving up its dead. Where dogs would howl to lie, women, and men, and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings.

Here, too, are lanes and alleys, paved with mud knee deep: underground chambers, where they dance and game; the walls bedecked with rough designs of ships, and forts, and flags, and American Eagles out of number: ruined houses, open to the street, whence, through wide gaps in the walls, other ruins loom upon the eye, as though the world of vice and misery had nothing

else to show: hideous tenements which take their name from robbery and murder; all that is loathsome, drooping, and decayed is here.

Our leader has his hand upon the latch of "Almack's," and calls to us from the bottom of the steps; for the assembly-room of the Five-Point fashionables is approached by a descent. Shall we go in? It is but a moment.

Heyday! the landlady of Almack's thrives! A buxom fat mulatto woman, with sparkling eyes, whose head is daintily ornamented with a handkerchief of many colours. Nor is the landlord much behind her in his finery, being attired in a smart blue jacket, like a ship's steward, with a thick gold ring upon his little finger, and round his neck a gleaming golden watch-guard. How glad he is to see us! What will we please to call for? A dance? It shall be done directly, sir: "a regular break-down."

The corpulent black fiddler, and his friend who plays the tambourine, stamp upon the boarding of the small raised orchestra in which they sit, and play a lively measure. Five or six couple come upon the floor, marshalled by a lively young negro, who is the wit of the assembly, and the greatest dancer known. He never leaves off making queer faces, and is the delight of all the rest, who grin from ear to ear incessantly. Among the dancers are two young mulatto girls, with large, black, drooping eyes, and head-gear after the fashion of the hostess, who are as shy, or feign to be, as though they never danced before, and so look down before the visitors, that their partners can see nothing but the long fringed lashes.

But the dance commences. Every gentleman sets as long as he likes to the opposite lady, and the opposite lady to him, and all are so long about it that the sport begins to languish, when suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue. Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine; new laughter in the dancers; new smiles in the landlady; new confidence in the landlord; new brightness in the very candles. Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut: snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs—all sorts of legs and no legs—what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound?

The air, even in these distempered parts, is fresh after the stifling atmosphere of the houses; and now, as we emerge into a broader street, it blows upon us with a purer breath, and the stars look bright again. Here are The Tombs once more. The city watch-house is a part of the building. It follows naturally on the sights we have just left. Let us see that, and then to bed.

What! do you thrust your common offenders against the police discipline of the town into such holes as these? Do men and women, against whom no crime is proved, lie here all night in perfect darkness, surrounded by the noisome vapours which encircle that flagging lamp you light us with, and breathing this filthy and offensive stench? Why, such indecent and disgusting dungeons as these cells would bring disgrace upon the most despotic empire in the world! Look at them, man—you, who see them every night, and keep the keys. Do you see what they are? Do you know how drains are made below the streets, and wherein these human sewers differ, except in being always stagnant?

Well, he don't know. He has had five-and-twenty young women locked up in this very cell at one time, and you'd hardly realise what handsome faces there were among 'em.

In God's name! shut the door upon the wretched creature who is in it now, and put its screen before a place quite unsurpassed in all the vice, neglect, and devilry of the worst old town in Europe.

Are people really left all night, untried, in those black sties?—Every night. The watch is set at seven in the evening. The magistrate opens his court at five in the morning. That is the earliest hour at which the first prisoner can be released; and if an officer appear against him, he is not taken out till nine o'clock or ten.—But if any one among them die in the interval, as one man did not long ago? Then he is half eaten by the rats in an hour's time, as that man was; and there an end.

What is this intolerable tolling of great bells, and crashing of wheels, and shouting in the distance? A fire. And what that deep red light in the opposite direction? Another fire. And what these charred and blackened walls we stand before? A dwelling where a fire has been. It was more than hinted, in an official report, not long ago, that some of these conflagrations were not wholly accidental, and that speculation and enterprise found a field of exer-

tion, even in flames: but, be this as it may, there was a fire last night, there are two to-night, and you may lay an even wager there will be at least one to-morrow. So, carrying that with us for our comfort, let us say, Good night, and climb up-stairs to bed.

One day, during my stay in New York, I paid a visit to the different public institutions on Long Island, or Rhode Island: I forget which. One of them is a Lunatic Asylum. The building is handsome; and is remarkable for a spacious and elegant staircase. The whole structure is not yet finished, but it is already one of considerable size and extent, and is capable of accommodating a very large number of patients.

I cannot say that I derived much comfort from the inspection of this charity. The different wards might have been cleaner and better ordered; I saw nothing of that salutary system

"WHEN SUDDENLY THE LIVELY HERO DASHES IN TO THE RESCUE."

which had impressed me so favourably elsewhere; and everything had a lounging, listless, madhouse air, which was very painful. The moping idiot, cowering down with long dishevelled hair; the gibbering maniac, with his hideous laugh and pointed finger; the vacant eye, the fierce wild face, the gloomy picking of the hands and lips, and munching of the nails: there they were all, without disguise, in naked ugliness and horror. In the dining-room, a bare, dull, dreary place, with nothing for the eye to rest on but the empty walls, a woman was locked up alone. She was bent, they told me, on committing suicide. If anything could have strengthened her in her resolution, it would certainly have been the insupportable monotony of such an existence.

The terrible crowd with which these halls and galleries were filled so shocked me, that I abridged my stay within the shortest limits, and declined to see that portion of the building in which the refractory and violent were under

closer restraint. I have no doubt that the gentleman who presided over this establishment at the time I write of, was competent to manage it, and had done all in his power to promote its usefulness: but will it be believed that the miserable strife of Party feeling is carried even into this sad refuge of afflicted and degraded humanity? Will it be believed that the eyes which are to watch over and control the wanderings of minds on which the most dreadful visitation to which our nature is exposed has fallen, must wear the glasses of some wretched side in Politics? Will it be believed that the governor of such a house as this is appointed, and deposed, and changed perpetually, as Parties fluctuate and vary, and as their despicable weather-cocks are blown this way or that? A hundred times in every week, some new most paltry exhibition of that narrow-minded and injurious Party Spirit which is the Simoom of America, sickening and blighting everything of wholesome life within its reach, was forced upon my notice; but I never turned my back upon it with feelings of such deep disgust and measureless contempt as when I crossed the threshold of this madhouse.

At a short distance from this building is another called the Alms House, that is to say, the workhouse of New York. This is a large institution also: lodging, I believe, when I was there, nearly a thousand poor. It was badly ventilated, and badly lighted; was not too clean; and impressed me, on the whole, very uncomfortably. But it must be remembered that New York, as a great emporium of commerce, and as a place of general resort, not only from all parts of the States, but from most parts of the world, has always a large pauper population to provide for; and labours, therefore, under peculiar difficulties in this respect. Nor must it be forgotten that New York is a large town, and that in all large towns a vast amount of good and evil is intermixed and jumbled up together.

In the same neighbourhood is the Farm, where young orphans are nursed and bred. I did not see it, but I believe it is well conducted; and I can the more easily credit it, from knowing how mindful they usually are, in America, of that beautiful passage in the Litany which remembers all sick persons and young children.

I was taken to these Institutions by water, in a boat belonging to the Island Gaol, and rowed by a crew of prisoners, who were dressed in a striped uniform of black and buff, in which they looked like faded tigers. They took me, by the same conveyance, to the Gaol itself.

It is an old prison, and quite a pioneer establishment, on the plan I have already described. I was glad to hear this, for it is unquestionably a very indifferent one. The most is made, however, of the means it possesses, and it is as well regulated as such a place can be.

The women worked in covered sheds erected for that purpose. If I remember right, there are no shops for the men; but, be that as it may, the greater part of them labour in certain stone quarries near at hand. The day being very wet indeed, this labour was suspended, and the prisoners were in their cells. Imagine these cells, some two or three hundred in number, and in every one a man locked up; this one at his door for air, with his hands thrust through the grate; this one in bed (in the middle of the day, remember); and this one flung down in a heap upon the ground, with his head against the bars, like a wild beast. Make the rain pour down, outside, in torrents. Put the everlasting stove in the midst; hot, and suffocating, and vaporous as a witch's cauldron. Add a collection of gentle odours, such as would arise from a thousand mildewed umbrellas, wet through, and a thousand buck-baskets, full of half-washed linen—and there is the prison as it was that day.

The prison for the State at Sing Sing is, on the other hand, a model gaol. That, and Auburn, are, I believe, the largest and best examples of the silent system.

In another part of the city is the Refuge for the Destitute: an Institution whose object is to reclaim youthful offenders, male and female, black and white, without distinction; to teach them useful trades, apprentice them to respectable masters, and make them worthy members of society. Its design, it will be seen, is similar to that at Boston; and it is a no less meritorious and admirable establishment. A suspicion crossed my mind during my inspection of this noble charity, whether the superintendent had quite sufficient knowledge of the world and worldly characters; and whether he did not commit a great mistake in treating some young girls, who were to all intents and purposes, by their years and their past lives, women, as though they were little children; which certainly had a ludicrous effect in my eyes, and, or I am much mistaken, in theirs also. As the Institution, however, is always under the vigilant examination of a body of gentlemen of great intelligence and experience, it cannot fail to be

well conducted; and whether I am right or wrong in this slight particular is unimportant to its deserts and character, which it would be difficult to estimate too highly.

In addition to these establishments, there are, in New York, excellent hospitals and schools, literary institutions and libraries; an admirable fire department (as, indeed, it should be, having constant practice), and charities of every sort and kind. In the suburbs there is a spacious cemetery; unfinished yet, but every day improving. The saddest tomb I saw there was "The Strangers' Grave. Dedicated to the different hotels in this city."

There are three principal theatres. Two of them, the Park and the Bowery, are large, elegant, and handsome buildings, and are, I grieve to write it, generally deserted. The third, the Olympic, is a tiny show-box for vaudevilles and burlesques. It is singularly well conducted by Mr. Mitchell, a comic actor of great quiet humour and originality, who is well remembered and esteemed by London play-goers. I am happy to report of this deserving gentleman, that his benches are usually well filled, and that his theatre rings with merriment every night. I had almost forgotten a small summer theatre, called Niblo's, with gardens and open-air amusements attached; but I believe it is not exempt from the general depression under which Theatrical Property, or what is humorously called by that name, unfortunately labours.

The country around New York is surpassingly and exquisitely picturesque. The climate, as I have already intimated, is somewhat of the warmest. What it would be without the sea breezes which come from its beautiful Bay in the evening-time, I will not throw myself or my readers into a fever by inquiring.

The tone of the best society in this city is like that of Boston; here and there, it may be, with a greater infusion of the mercantile spirit, but generally polished and refined, and always most hospitable. The houses and tables are elegant; the hours later and more rakish; and there is, perhaps, a greater spirit of contention in reference to appearances, and the display of wealth and costly living. The ladies are singularly beautiful.

Before I left New York I made arrangements for securing a passage home in the George Washington packet-ship, which was advertised to sail in June; that being the month in which I had determined, if prevented by no accident in the course of my ramblings, to leave America.

I never thought that going back to England, returning to all who are dear to me, and to pursuits that have insensibly grown to be part of my nature, I could have felt so much sorrow as I endured when I parted at last, on board this ship, with the friends who had accompanied me from this city. I never thought the name of any place so far away, and so lately known, could ever associate itself in my mind with the crowd of affectionate remembrances that now cluster about it. There are those in this city who would brighten, to me, the darkest winter day that ever glimmered and went out in Lapland; and before whose presence even Home grew dim, when they and I exchanged that painful word which mingles with our every thought and deed; which haunts our cradle-heads in infancy, and closes up the vista of our lives in age.

CHAPTER VII.

PHILADELPHIA, AND ITS SOLITARY PRISON.

THE journey from New York to Philadelphia is made by railroad, and two ferries; and usually occupies between five and six hours. It was a fine evening when we were passengers in the train: and watching the bright sunset from a little window near the door by which we sat, my attention was attracted to a remarkable appearance issuing from the windows of the gentlemen's car immediately in front of us, which I supposed for some time was occasioned by a number of industrious persons inside ripping open feather beds, and giving the feathers to the wind. At length it occurred to me that they were only spitting, which was indeed the case; though how any number of passengers which it was possible for that car to contain could have maintained such a playful and incessant shower of expectoration, I am still at a loss to understand: notwithstanding the experience in all salivatory phenomena which I afterwards acquired.

I made acquaintance, on this journey, with a mild and modest young Quaker, who opened the discourse by informing me, in a grave whisper, that his grandfather was the inventor of cold-drawn castor oil. I mention the circumstance here, thinking it probable that this is the first occasion on which the valuable medicine in question was ever used as a conversational aperient.

We reached the city late that night. Looking

out of my chamber window before going to bed, I saw, on the opposite side of the way, a handsome building of white marble, which had a mournful, ghost-like aspect, dreary to behold. I attributed this to the sombre influence of the night, and, on rising in the morning, looked out again, expecting to see its steps and portico thronged with groups of people passing in and out. The door was still tight shut, however; the same cold, cheerless air prevailed; and the building looked as if the marble statue of Don Guzman could alone have any business to transact within its gloomy walls. I hastened to inquire its name and purpose, and then my surprise vanished. It was the Tomb of many fortunes; the Great Catacomb of investment; the memorable United States Bank.

The stoppage of this bank, with all its ruinous consequences, had cast (as I was told on every side) a gloom on Philadelphia, under the depressing effect of which it yet laboured. It certainly did seem rather dull and out of spirits.

It is a handsome city, but distractingly regular. After walking about it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street. The collar of my coat appeared to stiffen, and the brim of my hat to expand, beneath its Quakerly influence. My hair shrunk into a sleek short crop, my hands folded themselves upon my breast of their own calm accord, and thoughts of taking lodgings in Mark Lane over against the Market-place, and of making a large fortune by speculations in corn, came over me involuntarily.

Philadelphia is most bountifully provided with fresh water, which is showered and jerked about, and turned on, and poured off everywhere. The Water-works, which are on a height near the city, are no less ornamental than useful, being tastefully laid out as a public garden, and kept in the best and neatest order. The river is dammed at this point, and forced by its own power into certain high tanks or reservoirs, whence the whole city, to the top stories of the houses, is supplied at a very trifling expense.

There are various public institutions. Among them a most excellent Hospital—a Quaker establishment, but not sectarian in the great benefits it confers; a quiet, quaint old Library, named after Franklin; a handsome Exchange and Post Office; and so forth. In connection with the Quaker Hospital there is a picture by West, which is exhibited for the benefit of the funds of the Institution. The subject is our Saviour healing the sick, and it is, perhaps, as favourable a specimen of the master as can be seen anywhere. Whether this be high or low praise, depends upon the reader's taste.

In the same room there is a very characteristic and lifelike portrait by Mr. Sully, a distinguished American artist.

My stay in Philadelphia was very short, but what I saw of its society I greatly liked. Treating of its general characteristics, I should be disposed to say that it is more provincial than Boston or New York, and that there is afloat in the fair city an assumption of taste and criticism, savouring rather of those genteel discussions upon the same themes, in connection with Shakspeare and the Musical Glasses, of which we read in the Vicar of Wakefield. Near the city is a most splendid unfinished marble structure for the Girard College, founded by a deceased gentleman of that name, and of enormous wealth, which, if completed according to the original design, will be perhaps the richest edifice of modern times. But the bequest is involved in legal disputes, and pending them the work has stopped; so that, like many other great undertakings in America, even this is rather going to be done one of these days than doing now.

In the outskirts stands a great prison, called the Eastern Penitentiary: conducted on a plan peculiar to the State of Pennsylvania. The system here is rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement. I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong.

In its intention I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who devised this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentlemen who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing. I believe that very few men are capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony which this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the sufferers; and in guessing at it myself, and in reasoning from what I have seen written upon their faces, and what to my certain knowledge they feel within, I am only the more convinced that there is a depth of terrible endurance in it which none but the sufferers themselves can fathom, and which no man has a right to inflict upon his fellow-creature. I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body: and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye and sense of touch as scars upon the flesh; because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I

the more denounce it, as a secret punishment which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay. I hesitated once, debating with myself whether, if I had the power of saying "Yes" or "No," I would allow it to be tried in certain cases, where the terms of imprisonment were short; but now I solemnly declare, that with no rewards or honours could I walk a happy man beneath the open sky by day, or lay me down upon my bed at night, with the consciousness that one human creature, for any length of time, no matter what, lay suffering this unknown punishment in his silent cell, and I the cause, or I consenting to it in the least degree.

I was accompanied to this prison by two gentlemen officially connected with its management, and passed the day in going from cell to cell, and talking with the inmates. Every facility was afforded me that the utmost courtesy could suggest. Nothing was concealed or hidden from my view, and every piece of information that I sought was openly and frankly given. The perfect order of the building cannot be praised too highly, and of the excellent motives of all who are immediately concerned in the administration of the system there can be no kind of question.

Between the body of the prison and the outer wall there is a spacious garden. Entering it by a wicket in the massive gate, we pursued the path before us to its other termination, and passed into a large chamber, from which seven long passages radiate. On either side of each is a long, long row of low cell doors, with a certain number over every one. Above, a gallery of cells like those below, except that they have no narrow yard attached (as those in the ground tier have), and are somewhat smaller. The possession of two of these is supposed to compensate for the absence of so much air and exercise as can be had in the dull strip attached to each of the others, in an hour's time every day; and therefore every prisoner in this upper story has two cells, adjoining, and communicating with, each other.

Standing at the central point, and looking down these dreary passages, the dull repose and quiet that prevails is awful. Occasionally there is a drowsy sound from some lone weaver's shuttle, or shoemaker's last, but it is stifled by the thick walls and heavy dungeon door, and only serves to make the general stillness more profound. Over the head and face of every prisoner who comes into this melancholy house a black hood is drawn; and in this dark shroud, an emblem of the curtain dropped between him and the living world, he is led to the cell from which he never again comes forth until his whole term of imprisonment has expired. He never hears of wife or children; home or friends; the life or death of any single creature. He sees the prison officers, but, with that exception, he never looks upon a human countenance, or hears a human voice. He is a man buried alive; to be dug out in the slow round of years; and in the meantime dead to everything but torturing anxieties and horrible despair.

His name, and crime, and term of suffering are unknown, even to the officer who delivers him his daily food. There is a number over his cell door, and in a book of which the governor of the prison has one copy, and the moral instructor another: this is the index to his history. Beyond these pages the prison has no record of his existence: and though he live to be in the same cell ten weary years, he has no means of knowing, down to the very last hour, in what part of the building it is situated; what kind of men there are about him; whether in the long winter nights there are living people near, or he is in some lonely corner of the great gaol, with walls, and passages, and iron doors between him and the nearest sharer in its solitary horrors.

Every cell has double doors: the outer one of sturdy oak, the other of grated iron, wherein there is a trap through which his food is handed. He has a Bible, and a slate and pencil, and, under certain restrictions, has sometimes other books, provided for the purpose, and pen and ink and paper. His razor, plate, and can, and basin hang upon the wall, or shine upon the little shelf. Fresh water is laid on in every cell, and he can draw it at his pleasure. During the day, his bedstead turns up against the wall, and leaves more space for him to work in. His loom, or bench, or wheel is there; and there he labours, sleeps and wakes, and counts the seasons as they change, and grows old.

The first man I saw was seated at his loom, at work. He had been there six years, and was to remain, I think, three more. He had been convicted as a receiver of stolen goods, but even after this long imprisonment denied his guilt, and said he had been hardly dealt by. It was his second offence.

He stopped his work when we went in, took off his spectacles, and answered freely to everything that was said to him, but always with a strange kind of pause first, and in a low, thoughtful voice. He wore a paper hat of his own making, and was pleased to have it noticed and commended. He had very ingeniously manufactured a sort of Dutch clock from some dis-

regarded odds and ends; and his vinegar bottle served for the pendulum. Seeing me interested in this contrivance, he looked up at it with a great deal of pride, and said that he had been thinking of improving it, and that he hoped the hammer and a little piece of broken glass beside it "would play music before long." He had extracted some colours from the yarn with which he worked, and painted a few poor figures on the wall. One, of a female, over the door, he called "The Lady of the Lake."

He smiled as I looked at these contrivances to while away the time; but, when I looked from them to him, I saw that his lip trembled, and could have counted the beating of his heart. I forget how it came about, but some allusion was made to his having a wife. He shook his head at the word, turned aside, and covered his face with his hands.

"But you are resigned now?" said one of the gentlemen after a short pause, during which he had resumed his former manner. He answered with a sigh that seemed quite reckless in its hopelessness, "Oh yes, oh yes! I am resigned to it." "And are a better man, you think?" "Well, I hope so: I'm sure I hope I may be." "And time goes pretty quickly?" "Time is very long, gentlemen, within these four walls!"

He gazed about him—Heaven only knows how wearily!—as he said these words; and, in the act of doing so, fell into a strange stare as if he had forgotten something. A moment afterwards he sighed heavily, put on his spectacles, and went about his work again.

In another cell there was a German, sentenced to five years' imprisonment for larceny, two of which had just expired. With colours procured in the same manner, he had painted every inch of the walls and ceiling quite beautifully. He had laid out the few feet of ground behind with exquisite neatness, and had made a little bed in the centre, that looked, by-the-bye, like a grave. The taste and ingenuity he had displayed in everything were most extraordinary; and yet a more dejected, heart-broken, wretched creature it would be difficult to imagine. I never saw such a picture of forlorn affliction and distress of mind. My heart bled for him; and when the tears ran down his cheeks, and he took one of the visitors aside, to ask, with his trembling hands nervously clutching at his coat to detain him, whether there was no hope of his dismal sentence being commuted, the spectacle was really too painful to witness. I never saw or heard of any kind of misery that impressed me more than the wretchedness of this man.

In a third cell was a tall, strong black, a burglar, working at his proper trade of making screws and the like. His time was nearly out. He was not only a very dexterous thief, but was notorious for his boldness and hardihood, and for the number of his previous convictions. He entertained us with a long account of his achievements, which he narrated with such infinite relish, that he actually seemed to lick his lips as he told us racy anecdotes of stolen plate, and of old ladies whom he had watched as they sat at windows in silver spectacles (he had plainly had an eye to their metal, even from the other side of the street), and had afterwards robbed. This fellow, upon the slightest encouragement, would have mingled with his professional recollections the most detestable cant; but I am very much mistaken if he could have surpassed the unmitigated hypocrisy with which he declared that he blessed the day on which he came into that prison, and that he never would commit another robbery as long as he lived.

There was one man who was allowed, as an indulgence, to keep rabbits. His room having rather a close smell in consequence, they called to him at the door to come out into the passage. He complied, of course, and stood shading his haggard face in the unwonted sun-light of the great window, looking as wan and unearthly as if he had been summoned from the grave. He had a white rabbit in his breast; and when the little creature, getting down upon the ground, stole back into the cell, and he, being dismissed, crept timidly after it, I thought it would have been very hard to say in what respect the man was the nobler animal of the two.

There was an English thief, who had been there but a few days out of seven years: a villainous, low-browed, thin-lipped fellow, with a white face; who had as yet no relish for visitors, and who, but for the additional penalty, would have gladly stabbed me with his shoemaker's knife. There was another German who had entered the gaol but yesterday, and who started from his bed when we looked in, and pleaded, in his broken English, very hard for work. There was a poet, who, after doing two days' work in every four-and-twenty hours, one for himself and one for the prison, wrote verses about ships (he was by trade a mariner), and the "maddening wine-cup," and his friends at home. There were very many of them. Some reddened at the sight of visitors, and some turned very pale. Some two or three had prisoner nurses with them, for they were very sick, and one, a fat old negro, whose leg had been taken off within the gaol, had for his attendant a classical scholar and an accomplished surgeon, himself a

prisoner likewise. Sitting upon the stairs, engaged in some slight work, was a pretty coloured boy. "Is there no refuge for young criminals in Philadelphia, then?" said I. "Yes, but only for white children." Noble aristocracy in crime!

There was a sailor who had been there upwards of eleven years, and who in a few months' time would be free. Eleven years of solitary confinement!

"I am very glad to hear your time is nearly out." What does he say? Nothing. Why does he stare at his hands, and pick the flesh upon his fingers, and raise his eyes for an instant, every now and then, to those bare walls which have seen his head turn grey? It is a way he has sometimes.

Does he never look men in the face, and does he always pluck at those hands of his, as though he were bent on parting skin and bone? It is his humour: nothing more.

It is his humour, too, to say that he does not look forward to going out; that he is not glad the time is drawing near; that he did look forward to it once, but that was very long ago; that he has lost all care for everything. It is his humour to be a helpless, crushed, and broken man. And, Heaven be his witness that he has his humour thoroughly gratified!

There were three young women in adjoining cells, all convicted at the same time of a conspiracy to rob their prosecutor. In the silence and solitude of their lives they had grown to be quite beautiful. Their looks were very sad, and might have moved the sternest visitor to tears, but not to that kind of sorrow which the contemplation of the men awakens. One was a young girl; not twenty, as I recollect; whose snow-white room was hung with the work of some former prisoner, and upon whose downcast face the sun in all its splendour shone down through the high chink in the wall, where one narrow strip of bright blue sky was visible. She was very penitent and quiet; had come to be resigned, she said (and I believe her); and had a mind at peace. "In a word, you are happy here?" said one of my companions. She struggled—she did struggle very hard—to answer, Yes: but raising her eyes, and meeting that glimpse of freedom overhead, she burst into tears, and said, "She tried to be; she uttered no complaint; but it was natural that she should sometimes long to go out of that one cell: she could not help *that*," she sobbed, poor thing!

I went from cell to cell that day; and every face I saw, or word I heard, or incident I noted, is present to my mind in all its painfulness. But let me pass them by, for one, more pleasant, glance of a prison on the same plan which I afterwards saw at Pittsburg.

When I had gone over that in the same manner, I asked the governor if he had any person in his charge who was shortly going out. He had one, he said, whose time was up next day; but he had only been a prisoner two years.

Two years! I looked back through two years in my own life—out of gaol, prosperous, happy, surrounded by blessings, comforts, and good fortune—and thought how wide a gap it was, and how long those two years passed in solitary captivity would have been. I have the face of this man, who was going to be released next day, before me now. It is almost more memorable in its happiness than the other faces in their misery. How easy and how natural it was for him to say that the system was a good one; and that the time went "pretty quick—considering;" and that when a man once felt he had offended the law, and must satisfy it, "he got along somehow;" and so forth!

"What did he call you back to say to you, in that strange flutter?" I asked of my conductor, when he had locked the door and joined me in the passage.

"Oh! That he was afraid the soles of his boots were not fit for walking, as they were a good deal worn when he came in; and that he would thank me very much to have them mended ready."

Those boots had been taken off his feet, and put away with the rest of his clothes, two years before!

I took that opportunity of inquiring how they conducted themselves immediately before going out; adding that I presumed they trembled very much.

"Well, it's not so much a trembling," was the answer—"though they do quiver—as a complete derangement of the nervous system. They can't sign their names to the book; sometimes can't even hold the pen; look about 'em without appearing to know why, or where they are; and sometimes get up and sit down again twenty times in a minute. This is when they're in the office, where they are taken with the hood on as they were brought in. When they get outside the gate, they stop, and look first one way and then the other: not knowing which to take. Sometimes they stagger as if they were drunk, and sometimes are forced to lean against the fence, they're so bad:—but they clear off in course of time."

As I walked among these solitary cells, and looked at the faces of the men within them, I

tried to picture to myself the thoughts and feelings natural to their condition. I imagined the hood just taken off, and the scene of their captivity disclosed to them in all its dismal monotony.

At first the man is stunned. His confinement is a hideous vision; and his old life a reality. He throws himself upon his bed, and lies there abandoned to despair. By degrees the insupportable solitude and barrenness of the place rouses him from this stupor, and when the trap in his grated door is opened, he humbly begs and prays for work. "Give me some work to do, or I shall go raving mad!"

He has it; and by fits and starts applies himself to labour; but every now and then there comes upon him a burning sense of the years that must be wasted in that stone coffin, and an agony so piercing in the recollection of those who are hidden from his view and knowledge, that he starts from his seat, and, striding up and down the narrow room with both hands clasped on his uplifted head, hears spirits tempting him to beat his brains out on the wall.

Again he falls upon his bed, and lies there moaning. Suddenly he starts up, wondering whether any other man is near; whether there is another cell like that on either side of him; and listens keenly.

There is no sound, but other prisoners may be near for all that. He remembers to have heard once, when he little thought of coming here himself, that the cells were so constructed that the prisoners could not hear each other, though the officers could hear them. Where is the nearest man—upon the right, or on the left? or is there one in both directions? Where is he sitting now—with his face to the light? or is he walking to and fro? How is he dressed? Has he been here long? Is he much worn away? Is he very white and spectre-like? Does *he* think of his neighbour too?

Scarcely venturing to breathe, and listening while he thinks, he conjures up a figure with his back towards him, and imagines it moving about in this next cell. He has no idea of the face, but he is certain of the dark form of a stooping man. In the cell upon the other side he puts another figure, whose face is hidden from him also. Day after day, and often when he wakes up in the middle of the night, he thinks of these two men until he is almost distracted. He never changes them. There they are always as he first imagined them—an old man on the right; a younger man upon the left—whose hidden features torture him to death, and have a mystery that makes him tremble.

The weary days pass on with solemn pace, like mourners at a funeral; and slowly he begins to feel that the white walls of the cell have something dreadful in them: that their colour is horrible: that their smooth surface chills his blood: that there is one hateful corner which torments him. Every morning, when he wakes, he hides his head beneath the coverlet, and shudders to see the ghastly ceiling looking down upon him. The blessed light of day itself peeps in, an ugly phantom face, through the unchangeable crevice which is his prison window.

By slow but sure degrees, the terrors of that hateful corner swell until they beset him at all times; invade his rest, make his dreams hideous, and his nights dreadful. At first he took a strange dislike to it: feeling as though it gave birth in his brain to something of corresponding shape, which ought not to be there, and racked his head with pains. Then he began to fear it, then to dream of it, and of men whispering its name and pointing to it. Then he could not bear to look at it, nor yet to turn his back upon it. Now, it is every night the lurking-place of a ghost: a shadow:—a silent something, horrible to see, but whether bird, or beast, or muffled human shape, he cannot tell.

When he is in his cell by day, he fears the little yard without. When he is in the yard, he dreads to re-enter the cell. When night comes, there stands the phantom in the corner. If he have the courage to stand in its place, and drive it out (he had once: being desperate), it broods upon his bed. In the twilight, and always at the same hour, a voice calls to him by name; as the darkness thickens, his Loom begins to live; and even that, his comfort, is a hideous figure, watching him till daybreak.

Again, by slow degrees, these horrible fancies depart from him one by one; returning sometimes unexpectedly, but at longer intervals, and in less alarming shapes. He has talked upon religious matters with the gentleman who visits him, and has read his Bible, and has written a prayer upon his slate, and hung it up as a kind of protection, and an assurance of Heavenly companionship. He dreams now, sometimes, of his children or his wife, but is sure that they are dead, or have deserted him. He is easily moved to tears; is gentle, submissive, and broken-spirited. Occasionally the old agony comes back: a very little thing will revive it: even a familiar sound, or the scent of summer flowers in the air; but it does not last long now: for the world without has come to be the vision, and this solitary life the sad reality.

If his term of imprisonment be short—I mean

comparatively, for short it cannot be—the last half-year is almost worse than all; for then he thinks the prison will take fire, and he be burnt in the ruins, or that he is doomed to die within the walls, or that he will be detained on some false charge, and sentenced for another term: or that something, no matter what, must happen to prevent his going at large. And this is natural, and impossible to be reasoned against, because, after his long separation from human life, and his great suffering, any event will appear to him more probable in the contemplation than the being restored to liberty and his fellow-creatures.

If his period of confinement have been very long, the prospect of release bewilders and confuses him. His broken heart may flutter for a moment, when he thinks of the world outside, and what it might have been to him in all those lonely years, but that is all. The cell door has been closed too long on all its hopes and cares. Better to have hanged him in the beginning than bring him to this pass, and send him forth to mingle with his kind, who are his kind no more.

On the haggard face of every man among these prisoners the same expression sat. I know not what to liken it to. It had something of that strained attention which we see upon the faces of the blind and deaf, mingled with a kind of horror, as though they had all been secretly terrified. In every little chamber that I entered, and at every grate through which I looked, I seemed to see the same appalling countenance. It lives in my memory, with the fascination of a remarkable picture. Parade before my eyes a hundred men, with one among them newly released from his solitary suffering, and I would point him out.

The faces of the women, as I have said, it humanises and refines. Whether this be because of their better nature, which is elicited in solitude, or because of their being gentler creatures, of greater patience and longer suffering, I do not know; but so it is. That the punishment is nevertheless, to my thinking, fully as cruel and as wrong in their case as in that of the men, I need scarcely add.

My firm conviction is that, independent of the mental anguish it occasions—an anguish so acute and so tremendous, that all imagination of it must fall far short of the reality—it wears the mind into a morbid state, which renders it unfit for the rough contact and busy action of the world. It is my fixed opinion that those who have undergone this punishment MUST pass into society again morally unhealthy and diseased. There are many instances on record of men who have chosen, or have been condemned, to lives of perfect solitude, but I scarcely remember one, even among sages of strong and vigorous intellect, where its effect has not become apparent, in some disordered train of thought, or some gloomy hallucination. What monstrous phantoms, bred of despondency and doubt, and born and reared in solitude, have stalked upon the earth, making creation ugly, and darkening the face of Heaven!

Suicides are rare among these prisoners: are almost, indeed, unknown. But no argument in favour of the system can reasonably be deduced from this circumstance, although it is very often urged. All men who have made diseases of the mind their study, know perfectly well that such extreme depression and despair as will change the whole character, and beat down all its powers of elasticity and self-resistance, may be at work within a man, and yet stop short of self-destruction. This is a common case.

That it makes the senses dull, and by degrees impairs the bodily faculties, I am quite sure. I remarked to those who were with me in this very establishment at Philadelphia, that the criminals who had been there long were deaf. They, who were in the habit of seeing these men constantly, were perfectly amazed at the idea, which they regarded as groundless and fanciful. And yet the very first prisoner to whom they appealed—one of their own selection—confirmed my impression (which was unknown to him) instantly, and said, with a genuine air it was impossible to doubt, that he couldn't think how it happened, but he *was* growing very dull of hearing.

That it is a singularly unequal punishment, and affects the worst man least, there is no doubt. In its superior efficiency as a means of reformation, compared with that other code of regulations which allows the prisoners to work in company without communicating together, I have not the smallest faith. All the instances of reformation that were mentioned to me were of a kind that might have been—and I have no doubt whatever, in my own mind, would have been—equally well brought about by the Silent System. With regard to such men as the negro burglar and the English thief, even the most enthusiastic have scarcely any hope of their conversion.

It seems to me that the objection that nothing wholesome or good has ever had its growth in such unnatural solitude, and that even a dog, or any of the more intelligent among beasts, would pine, and mope, and rust away beneath its

influence, would be in itself a sufficient argument against this system. But when we recollect, in addition, how very cruel and severe it is, and that a solitary life is always liable to peculiar and distinct objections of a most deplorable nature, which have arisen here; and call to mind, moreover, that the choice is not between this system and a bad or ill-considered one, but between it and another which has worked well, and is, in its whole design and practice, excellent; there is surely more than sufficient reason for abandoning a mode of punishment attended by so little hope or promise, and fraught, beyond dispute, with such a host of evils.

As a relief to its contemplation, I will close this chapter with a curious story, arising out of the same theme, which was related to me, on the occasion of this visit, by some of the gentlemen concerned.

At one of the periodical meetings of the inspectors of this prison, a working-man of Philadelphia presented himself before the Board, and earnestly requested to be placed in solitary confinement. On being asked what motive could possibly prompt him to make this strange demand, he answered that he had an irresistible propensity to get drunk; that he was constantly indulging in it, to his great misery and ruin; that he had no power of resistance; that he wished to be put beyond the reach of temptation; and that he could think of no better way than this. It was pointed out to him, in reply, that the prison was for criminals who had been tried and sentenced by the law, and could not be made available for any such fanciful purposes; he was exhorted to abstain from intoxicating drinks, as he surely might if he would; and received other very good advice, with which he retired, exceedingly dissatisfied with the result of his application.

He came again, and again, and again, and was so very earnest and importunate, that at last they took counsel together, and said, "He will certainly qualify himself for admission, if we reject him any more. Let us shut him up. He will soon be glad to go away, and then we shall get rid of him." So they made him sign a statement which would prevent his ever sustaining an action for false imprisonment, to the effect that his incarceration was voluntary, and of his own seeking; they requested him to take notice that the officer in attendance had orders to release him at any hour of the day or night, when he might knock upon his door for that purpose; but desired him to understand, that once going out, he would not be admitted any more. These conditions agreed upon, and he still remaining in the same mind, he was conducted to the prison, and shut up in one of the cells.

In this cell, the man who had not the firmness to leave a glass of liquor standing untasted on a table before him—in this cell, in solitary confinement, and working every day at his trade of shoemaking, this man remained nearly two years. His health beginning to fail at the expiration of that time, the surgeon recommended that he should work occasionally in the garden; and, as he liked the notion very much, he went about this new occupation with great cheerfulness.

He was digging here, one summer day, very industriously, when the wicket in the outer gate chanced to be left open; showing, beyond, the well-remembered dusty road and sunburnt fields. The way was as free to him as to any man living, but he no sooner raised his head and caught sight of it, all shining in the light, than, with the involuntary instinct of a prisoner, he cast away his spade, scampered off as fast as his legs would carry him, and never once looked back.

CHAPTER VIII.

WASHINGTON. THE LEGISLATURE. AND THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE.

WE left Philadelphia by steamboat, at six o'clock one very cold morning, and turned our faces towards Washington.

In the course of this day's journey, as on subsequent occasions, we encountered some Englishmen (small farmers, perhaps, or country publicans at home) who were settled in America, and were travelling on their own affairs. Of all grades and kinds of men that jostle one in the public conveyances of the States, these are often the most intolerable and the most insufferable companions. United to every disagreeable characteristic that the worst kind of American travellers possess, these countrymen of ours display an amount of insolent conceit and cool assumption of superiority quite monstrous to behold. In the coarse familiarity of their approach, and the effrontery of their inquisitiveness (which they are in great haste to assert, as if they panted to revenge themselves upon the decent old restraints of home), they surpass any native specimens that came within my range of observation: and I often grew so patriotic when I saw and heard them, that I would cheerfully have submitted to a reasonable fine, if I could have given any

other country in the whole world the honour of claiming them for its children.

As Washington may be called the head-quarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva, the time is come when I must confess, without any disguise, that the prevalence of those two odious practices of chewing and expectorating began about this time to be anything but agreeable, and soon became most offensive and sickening. In all the public places of America this filthy custom is recognised. In the courts of law the judge has his spittoon, the crier his, the witness his, and the prisoner his; while the jurymen and spectators are provided for, as so many men who in the course of nature must desire to spit incessantly. In the hospitals the students of medicine are requested, by notices upon the wall, to eject their tobacco juice into the boxes provided for that purpose, and not to discolour the stairs. In public buildings visitors are implored, through the same agency, to squirt the essence of their quids, or "plugs," as I have heard them called by a gentleman learned in this kind of sweetmeat, into the national spittoons, and not about the bases of the marble columns. But in some parts this custom is inseparably mixed up with every meal and morning call, and with all the transactions of social life. The stranger, who follows in the track I took myself, will find it in its full bloom and glory, luxuriant in all its alarming recklessness, at Washington. And let him not persuade himself (as I once did, to my shame) that previous tourists have exaggerated its extent. The thing itself is an exaggeration of nastiness, which cannot be outdone.

On board this steamboat there were two young gentlemen, with shirt collars reversed as usual, and armed with very big walking-sticks; who planted two seats in the middle of the deck, at a distance of some four paces apart; took out their tobacco boxes; and sat down opposite each other to chew. In less than a quarter of an hour's time, these hopeful youths had shed about them, on the clean boards, a copious shower of yellow rain; clearing, by that means, a kind of magic circle, within whose limits no intruders dared to come, and which they never failed to refresh and re-refresh before a spot was dry. This being before breakfast, rather disposed me, I confess, to nausea; but looking attentively at one of the expectorators, I plainly saw that he was young in chewing, and felt inwardly uneasy himself. A glow of delight came over me at this discovery; and, as I marked his face turn paler and paler, and saw the ball of tobacco in his left cheek quiver with his suppressed agony, while yet he spat, and chewed, and spat again, in emulation of his older friend, I could have fallen on his neck and implored him to go on for hours.

We all sat down to a comfortable breakfast in the cabin below, where there was no more hurry or confusion than at such a meal in England, and where there was certainly greater politeness exhibited than at most of our stage-coach banquets. At about nine o'clock we arrived at the railroad station, and went on by the cars. At noon we turned out again, to cross a wide river in another steamboat; landed at a continuation of the railroad on the opposite shore; and went on by other cars; in which, in the course of the next hour or so, we crossed by wooden bridges, each a mile in length, two creeks, called respectively Great and Little Gunpowder. The water in both was blackened with flights of canvas-backed ducks, which are most delicious eating, and abound hereabouts at that season of the year.

These bridges are of wood, have no parapet, and are only just wide enough for the passage of the trains; which, in the event of the smallest accident, would inevitably be plunged into the river. They are startling contrivances, and are most agreeable when passed.

We stopped to dine at Baltimore, and, being now in Maryland, were waited on, for the first time, by slaves. The sensation of exacting any service from human creatures who are bought and sold, and being, for the time, a party as it were to their condition, is not an enviable one. The institution exists, perhaps, in its least repulsive and most mitigated form in such a town as this; but it *is* slavery; and though I was, with respect to it, an innocent man, its presence filled me with a sense of shame and self-reproach.

After dinner we went down to the railroad again, and took our seats in the cars for Washington. Being rather early, those men and boys who happened to have nothing particular to do, and were curious in foreigners, came (according to custom) round the carriage in which I sat; let down all the windows; thrust in their heads and shoulders; hooked themselves on conveniently by their elbows; and fell to comparing notes on the subject of my personal appearance, with as much indifference as if I were a stuffed figure. I never gained so much uncompromising information with reference to my own nose and eyes, the various impressions wrought by my mouth and chin on different minds, and how my head looks when it is viewed from behind, as on these occasions. Some gentlemen were only satisfied by exercising their sense of touch; and the boys (who are surprisingly precocious in

America) were seldom satisfied even by that, but would return to the charge over and over again. Many a budding president has walked into my room with his cap on his head and his hands in his pockets, and stared at me for two whole hours: occasionally refreshing himself with a tweak at his nose, or a draught from the water jug; or by walking to the windows, and inviting other boys in the street below to come up and do likewise: crying, "Here he is!" "Come on!" "Bring all your brothers!" with other hospitable entreaties of that nature.

We reached Washington at about half-past six that evening, and had upon the way a beautiful view of the Capitol, which is a fine building of the Corinthian order, placed upon a noble and commanding eminence. Arrived at the hotel, I saw no more of the place that night; being very tired, and glad to get to bed.

Breakfast over next morning, I walk about the streets for an hour or two, and, coming home, throw up the window in the front and back, and look out. Here is Washington, fresh in my mind and under my eye.

Take the worst parts of the City Road and Pentonville, or the straggling outskirts of Paris, where the houses are smallest, preserving all their oddities, but especially the small shops and dwellings occupied in Pentonville (but not in Washington) by furniture brokers, keepers of poor eating-houses, and fanciers of birds. Burn the whole down; build it up again in wood and plaster; widen it a little; throw in part of St. John's Wood; put green blinds outside all the private houses, with a red curtain and a white one in every window; plough up all the roads; plant a great deal of coarse turf in every place where it ought *not* to be; erect three handsome buildings in stone and marble anywhere, but the more entirely out of everybody's way the better; call one the Post Office, one the Patent Office, and one the Treasury; make it scorching hot in the morning, and freezing cold in the afternoon, with an occasional tornado of wind and dust; leave a brick-field, without the bricks, in all central places where a street may naturally be expected; and that's Washington.

The hotel in which we live is a long row of small houses fronting on the street, and opening at the back upon a common yard, in which hangs a great triangle. Whenever a servant is wanted, somebody beats on this triangle from one stroke up to seven, according to the number of the house in which his presence is required; and as all the servants are always being wanted, and none of them ever come, this enlivening engine is in full performance the whole day through. Clothes are drying in this same yard; female slaves, with cotton handkerchiefs twisted round their heads, are running to and fro on the hotel business; black waiters cross and recross with dishes in their hands; two great dogs are playing upon a mound of loose bricks in the centre of the little square; a pig is turning up his stomach to the sun, and grunting "That's comfortable!" and neither the men, nor the women, nor the dogs, nor the pig, nor any created creature takes the smallest notice of the triangle, which is tingling madly all the time.

I walk to the front window, and look across the road upon a long, straggling row of houses, one story high, terminating nearly opposite, but a little to the left, in a melancholy piece of waste ground with frouzy grass, which looks like a small piece of country that has taken to drinking, and has quite lost itself. Standing anyhow and all wrong, upon this open space, like something meteoric that has fallen down from the moon, is an odd, lop-sided, one-eyed kind of wooden building, that looks like a church, with a flagstaff as long as itself sticking out of a steeple something larger than a tea-chest. Under the window is a small stand of coaches, whose slave drivers are sunning themselves on the steps of our door, and talking idly together. The three most obtrusive houses near at hand are the three meanest. On one—a shop, which never has anything in the window, and never has the door open—is painted in large characters, "THE CITY LUNCH." At another, which looks like the back-way to somewhere else, but is an independent building in itself, oysters are procurable in every style. At the third, which is a very, very little tailor's shop, pants are fixed to order; or, in other words, pantaloons are made to measure. And that is our street in Washington.

It is sometimes called the City of Magnificent Distances, but it might with greater propriety be termed the City of Magnificent Intentions; for it is only on taking a bird's-eye view of it from the top of the Capitol that one can at all comprehend the vast designs of its projector, an aspiring Frenchman. Spacious avenues that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere; streets, mile long, that only want houses, roads, and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete; and ornaments of great thoroughfares, which only lack great thoroughfares to ornament—are its leading features. One might fancy the season over, and most of the houses gone out of town for ever with their masters. To the admirers of cities it is a Barmecide Feast; a pleasant field for the imagi-

nation to rove in; a monument raised to a deceased project, with not even a legible inscription to record its departed greatness.

Such as it is, it is likely to remain. It was originally chosen for the seat of Government as a means of averting the conflicting jealousies and interests of the different States; and very probably, too, as being remote from mobs: a consideration not to be slighted, even in America. It has no trade or commerce of its own: having little or no population beyond the President and his establishment: the members of the legislature, who reside there during the session; the Government clerks and officers employed in the various departments; the keepers of the hotels and boarding-houses; and the tradesmen who supply their tables. It is very unhealthy. Few people would live in Washington, I take it, who were not obliged to reside there; and the tides of emigration and speculation, those rapid and regardless currents, are little likely to flow at any time towards such dull and sluggish water.

The principal features of the Capitol are, of course, the two Houses of Assembly. But there is, besides, in the centre of the building, a fine rotunda, ninety-six feet in diameter, and ninety-six high, whose circular wall is divided into compartments, ornamented by historical pictures. Four of these have for their subjects prominent events in the revolutionary struggle. They were painted by Colonel Trumbull, himself a member of Washington's staff at the time of their occurrence; from which circumstance they derive a peculiar interest of their own. In this same hall Mr. Greenough's large statue of Washington has been lately placed. It has great merits, of course, but it struck me as being rather strained and violent for its subject. I could wish, however, to have seen it in a better light than it can ever be viewed in where it stands.

There is a very pleasant and commodious library in the Capitol; and from a balcony in front, the bird's-eye view, of which I have just spoken, may be had, together with a beautiful prospect of the adjacent country. In one of the ornamented portions of the building there is a figure of Justice; whereunto, the Guide Book says, "the artist at first contemplated giving more of nudity, but he was warned that the public sentiment in this country would not admit of it, and in his caution he has gone, perhaps, into the opposite extreme." Poor Justice! she has been made to wear much stranger garments in America than those she pines in in the Capitol. Let us hope that she has changed her dressmaker since they were fashioned, and that the public sentiment of the country did not cut out the clothes she hides her lovely figure in just now.

The House of Representatives is a beautiful and spacious hall of semicircular shape, supported by handsome pillars. One part of the gallery is appropriated to the ladies, and there they sit in front rows, and come in, and go out, as at a play or concert. The chair is canopied, and raised considerably above the floor of the House; and every member has an easy-chair and a writing-desk to himself: which is denounced by some people out of doors as a most unfortunate and injudicious arrangement, tending to long sittings and prosaic speeches. It is an elegant chamber to look at, but a singularly bad one for all purposes of hearing. The Senate, which is smaller, is free from this objection, and is exceedingly well adapted to the uses for which it is designed. The sittings, I need hardly add, take place in the day; and the parliamentary forms are modelled on those of the old country.

I was sometimes asked, in my progress through other places, whether I had not been very much impressed by the *heads* of the law-makers at Washington; meaning not their chiefs and leaders, but literally their individual and personal heads, whereon their hair grew, and whereby the phrenological character of each legislator was expressed; and I almost as often struck my questioner dumb with indignant consternation by answering, "No, that I didn't remember being at all overcome." As I must, at whatever hazard, repeat the avowal here, I will follow it up by relating my impressions on this subject in as few words as possible.

In the first place—it may be from some imperfect development of my organ of veneration—I do not remember having ever fainted away, or having even been moved to tears of joyful pride, at sight of any legislative body. I have borne the House of Commons like a man, and have yielded to no weakness, but slumber, in the House of Lords. I have seen elections for borough and county, and have never been impelled (no matter which party won) to damage my hat by throwing it up into the air in triumph, or to crack my voice by shouting forth any reference to our Glorious Constitution, to the noble purity of our independent voters, or the unimpeachable integrity of our independent members. Having withstood such strong attacks upon my fortitude, it is possible that I may be of a cold and insensible temperament, amounting to iciness, in such matters; and therefore my impressions of the live pillars of the Capitol at Washington must be received with such grains

of allowance as this free confession may seem to demand.

Did I see in this public body an assemblage of men, bound together in the sacred names of Liberty and Freedom, and so asserting the chaste dignity of those twin goddesses, in all their discussions, as to exalt at once the Eternal Principles to which their names are given, and their own character, and the character of their countrymen, in the admiring eyes of the whole world?

It was but a week since an aged, grey-haired man, a lasting honour to the land that gave him birth, who has done good service to his country, as his forefathers did, and who will be remembered scores upon scores of years after the worms bred in its corruption are but so many grains of dust—it was but a week since this old man had stood for days upon his trial before this very body, charged with having dared to assert the infamy of that traffic which has for its accursed merchandise men and women, and their unborn children. Yes. And publicly exhibited in the same city all the while; gilded, framed, and glazed; hung up for general admiration; shown to strangers, not with shame, but pride; its face not turned towards the wall, itself not taken down and burned; is the Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, which solemnly declares that All Men are created Equal; and are endowed by their Creator with the Inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness!

It was not a month since this same body had sat calmly by, and heard a man, one of themselves, with oaths which beggars in their drink reject, threaten to cut another's throat from ear to ear. There he sat among them; not crushed by the general feeling of the assembly, but as good a man as any.

There was but a week to come, and another of that body, for doing his duty to those who sent him there; for claiming in a Republic the Liberty and Freedom of expressing their sentiments, and making known their prayer; would be tried, found guilty, and have strong censure passed upon him by the rest. His was a grave offence indeed; for, years before, he had risen up and said, "A gang of male and female slaves for sale, warranted to breed like cattle, linked to each other by iron fetters, are passing now along the open street beneath the windows of your Temple of Equality! Look!" But there are many kinds of hunters engaged in the Pursuit of Happiness, and they go variously armed. It is the Inalienable Right of some among them to take the field after *their* Happiness, equipped with cat and cart-whip, stocks, and iron collar, and to shout their view halloa (always in praise of Liberty) to the music of clanking chains and bloody stripes.

Where sat the many legislators of coarse threats; of words and blows such as coalheavers deal upon each other, when they forget their breeding? On every side. Every session had its anecdotes of that kind, and the actors were all there.

Did I recognise in this assembly a body of men who, applying themselves in a new world to correct some of the falsehoods and vices of the old, purified the avenues to Public Life, paved the dirty ways to Place and Power, debated and made laws for the Common Good, and had no party but their Country?

I saw in them the wheels that move the meanest perversion of virtuous Political Machinery that the worst tools ever wrought. Despicable trickery at elections; under-handed tamperings with public officers; cowardly attacks upon opponents, with scurrilous newspapers for shields, and hired pens for daggers; shameful trucklings to mercenary knaves, whose claim to be considered is, that every day and week they sow new crops of ruin with their venal types, which are the dragon's teeth of yore, in everything but sharpness; aidings and abettings of every bad inclination in the popular mind, and artful suppressions of all its good influences: such things as these, and, in a word, Dishonest Faction in its most depraved and most unblushing form, stared out from every corner of the crowded hall.

Did I see among them the intelligence and refinement: the true, honest, patriotic heart of America? Here and there were drops of its blood and life, but they scarcely coloured the stream of desperate adventurers which sets that way for profit and for pay. It is the game of these men, and of their profligate organs, to make the strife of politics so fierce and brutal, and so destructive of all self-respect in worthy men, that sensitive and delicate-minded persons shall be kept aloof, and they, and such as they, be left to battle out their selfish views unchecked. And thus this lowest of all scrambling fights goes on, and they who in other countries would, from their intelligence and station, most aspire to make the laws, do here recoil the farthest from that degradation.

That there are, among the representatives of the people in both Houses, and among all parties, some men of high character and great abilities, I need not say. The foremost among those politicians who are known in Europe have been already described, and I see no reason to

depart from the rule I have laid down for my guidance, of abstaining from all mention of individuals. It will be sufficient to add that, to the most favourable accounts that have been written of them, I more than fully and most heartily subscribe; and that personal intercourse and free communication have bred within me, not the result predicted in the very doubtful proverb, but increased admiration and respect. They are striking men to look at, hard to deceive, prompt to act, lions in energy, Crichtons in varied accomplishments, Indians in fire of eye and gesture, Americans in strong and generous impulse; and they as well represent the honour and wisdom of their country at home, as the distinguished gentleman who is now its minister at the British Court sustains its highest character abroad.

I visited both Houses nearly every day during my stay in Washington. On my initiatory visit to the House of Representatives, they divided against a decision of the chair; but the chair won. The second time I went, the member who was speaking, being interrupted by a laugh, mimicked it, as one child would in quarrelling with another, and added "that he would make honourable gentlemen opposite sing out a little more on the other side of their mouths presently." But interruptions are rare; the speaker being usually heard in silence. There are more quarrels than with us, and more threatenings than gentlemen are accustomed to exchange in any civilised society of which we have record: but farmyard imitations have not as yet been imported from the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The feature in oratory which appears to be the most practised, and most relished, is the constant repetition of the same idea, or shadow of an idea, in fresh words; and the inquiry out of doors is not, "What did he say?" but, "How long did he speak?" These, however, are but enlargements of a principle which prevails elsewhere.

The Senate is a dignified and decorous body, and its proceedings are conducted with much gravity and order. Both Houses are handsomely carpeted; but the state to which these carpets are reduced by the universal disregard of the spittoon with which every honourable member is accommodated, and the extraordinary improvements on the pattern which are squirted and dabbled upon it in every direction, do not admit of being described. I will merely observe, that I strongly recommend all strangers not to look at the floor; and if they happen to drop anything, though it be their purse, not to pick it up with an engloved hand on any account.

It is somewhat remarkable too, at first, to say the least, to see so many honourable members with swelled faces; and it is scarcely less remarkable to discover that this appearance is caused by the quantity of tobacco they contrive to stow within the hollow of the cheek. It is strange enough, too, to see an honourable gentleman leaning back in his tilted chair, with his legs on the desk before him, shaping a convenient "plug" with his penknife, and when it is quite ready for use, shooting the old one from his mouth as from a pop-gun, and clapping the new one in its place.

I was surprised to observe that even steady old chewers of great experience are not always good marksmen, which has rather inclined me to doubt that general proficiency with the rifle, of which we have heard so much in England. Several gentlemen called upon me who, in the course of conversation, frequently missed the spittoon at five paces; and one (but he was certainly short-sighted) mistook the closed sash for the open window at three. On another occasion, when I dined out, and was sitting with two ladies and some gentlemen round a fire before dinner, one of the company fell short of the fire-place six distinct times. I am disposed to think, however, that this was occasioned by his not aiming at that object; as there was a white marble hearth before the fender, which was more convenient and may have suited his purpose better.

The Patent Office at Washington furnishes an extraordinary example of American enterprise and ingenuity; for the immense number of models it contains are the accumulated inventions of only five years: the whole of the previous collection having been destroyed by fire. The elegant structure in which they are arranged is one of design rather than execution, for there is but one side erected out of four, though the works are stopped. The Post Office is a very compact and very beautiful building. In one of the departments, among a collection of rare and curious articles, are deposited the presents which have been made from time to time to the American ambassadors at foreign courts by the various potentates to whom they were the accredited agents of the Republic: gifts which, by the law, they are not permitted to retain. I confess that I looked upon this as a very painful exhibition, and one by no means flattering to the national standard of honesty and honour. There can scarcely be a high state of moral feeling which imagines a gentleman of repute and station likely to be corrupted, in the discharge of his duty, by the present of a snuff-box,

or a richly-mounted sword, or an Eastern shawl; and surely the Nation who reposes confidence in her appointed servants is likely to be better served than she who makes them the subject of such very mean and paltry suspicions.

At George Town, in the suburbs, there is a Jesuit College; delightfully situated, and, so far as I had an opportunity of seeing, well managed. Many persons who are not members of the Romish church avail themselves, I believe, of these institutions, and of the advantageous opportunities they afford for the education of their children. The heights in this neighbourhood, above the Potomac River, are very picturesque; and are free, I should conceive, from some of the insalubrities of Washington. The air, at that elevation, was quite cool and refreshing, when in the city it was burning hot.

The President's mansion is more like an English club-house, both within and without, than any other kind of establishment with which I can compare it. The ornamental ground about it has been laid out in garden walks; they are pretty, and agreeable to the eye; though they have that uncomfortable air of having been made yesterday, which is far from favourable to the display of such beauties.

My first visit to this house was on the morning after my arrival, when I was carried thither by an official gentleman, who was so kind as to charge himself with my presentation to the President.

We entered a large hall, and, having twice or thrice rung a bell which nobody answered, walked without further ceremony through the rooms on the ground-floor, as divers other gentlemen (mostly with their hats on, and their hands in their pockets) were doing very leisurely. Some of these had ladies with them, to whom they were showing the premises; others were lounging on the chairs and sofas; others, in a perfect state of exhaustion from listlessness, were yawning drearily. The greater portion of this assemblage were rather asserting their supremacy than doing anything else, as they had no particular business there, that anybody knew of. A few were closely eyeing the movables, as if to make quite sure that the President (who was far from popular) had not made away with any of the furniture, or sold the fixtures for his private benefit.

After glancing at these loungers; who were scattered over a pretty drawing-room, opening upon a terrace which commanded a beautiful prospect of the river and the adjacent country; and who were sauntering, too, about a larger state-room called the Eastern Drawing-room; we went up-stairs into another chamber, where were certain visitors waiting for audiences. At sight of my conductor, a black in plain clothes and yellow slippers who was gliding noiselessly about, and whispering messages in the ears of the more impatient, made a sign of recognition, and glided off to announce him.

We had previously looked into another chamber fitted all round with a great bare wooden desk or counter, whereon lay files of newspapers, to which sundry gentlemen were referring. But there were no such means of beguiling the time in this apartment, which was as unpromising and tiresome as any waiting-room in one of our public establishments, or any physician's dining-room during his hours of consultation at home.

There were some fifteen or twenty persons in the room. One, a tall, wiry, muscular old man, from the west; sunburnt and swarthy; with a brown-white hat on his knees, and a giant umbrella resting between his legs; who sat bolt upright in his chair, frowning steadily at the carpet, and twitching the hard lines about his mouth, as if he had made up his mind "to fix" the President on what he had to say, and wouldn't bate him a grain. Another, a Kentucky farmer, six feet six in height, with his hat on, and his hands under his coat-tails, who leaned against the wall and kicked the floor with his heel, as though he had Time's head under his shoe, and were literally "killing" him. A third, an oval-faced, bilious-looking man, with sleek black hair cropped close, and whiskers and beard shaved down to blue dots, who sucked the head of a thick stick, and from time to time took it out of his mouth to see how it was getting on. A fourth did nothing but whistle. A fifth did nothing but spit. And, indeed, all these gentlemen were so very persevering and energetic in this latter particular, and bestowed their favours so abundantly upon the carpet, that I take it for granted the Presidential housemaids have high wages, or, to speak more genteelly, an ample amount of "compensation:" which is the American word for salary in the case of all public servants.

We had not waited in this room many minutes before the black messenger returned, and conducted us into another of smaller dimensions, where, at a business-like table covered with papers, sat the President himself. He looked somewhat worn and anxious,—and well he might: being at war with everybody,—but the expression of his face was mild and pleasant, and his manner was remarkably unaffected, gentlemanly, and agreeable. I thought that, in his whole carriage and demeanour, he became his station singularly well.

Being advised that the sensible etiquette of the republican court admitted of a traveller, like myself, declining, without any impropriety, an invitation to dinner, which did not reach me until I had concluded my arrangements for leaving Washington some days before that to which it referred, I only returned to this house once. It was on the occasion of one of those general assemblies which are held on certain nights, between the hours of nine and twelve o'clock, and are called, rather oddly, Levees.

I went, with my wife, at about ten. There was a pretty dense crowd of carriages and people in the courtyard, and, so far as I could make out, there were no very clear regulations for the taking up or setting down of company. There were certainly no policemen to soothe startled horses, either by sawing at their bridles or flourishing truncheons in their eyes; and I am ready to make oath that no inoffensive persons were knocked violently on the head, or poked acutely in their backs or stomachs; or brought

IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

to a stand-still by any such gentle means, and then taken into custody for not moving on. But there was no confusion or disorder. Our carriage reached the porch in its turn, without any blustering, swearing, shouting, backing, or other disturbance: and we dismounted with as much ease and comfort as though we had been escorted by the whole Metropolitan Force, from A to Z inclusive.

The suite of rooms on the ground-floor were lighted up; and a military band was playing in the hall. In the smaller drawing-room, the centre of a circle of company, were the President and his daughter-in-law, who acted as the lady of the mansion: and a very interesting, graceful, and accomplished lady too. One gentleman who stood among this group appeared to take upon himself the functions of a master of the ceremonies. I saw no other officers or attendants, and none were needed.

The great drawing-room which I have already mentioned, and the other chambers on the ground-

floor, were crowded to excess. The company was not, in our sense of the term, select, for it comprehended persons of very many grades and classes; nor was there any great display of costly attire: indeed, some of the costumes may have been, for aught I know, grotesque enough. But the decorum and propriety of behaviour which prevailed were unbroken by any rude or disagreeable incident; and every man, even among the miscellaneous crowd in the hall who were admitted without any orders or tickets to look on, appeared to feel that he was a part of the Institution, and was responsible for its preserving a becoming character, and appearing to the best advantage.

That these visitors, too, whatever their station, were not without some refinement of taste and appreciation of intellectual gifts, and gratitude to those men who, by the peaceful exercise of great abilities, shed new charms and associations upon the homes of their countrymen, and elevate their character in other lands, was most earnestly testified by their reception of Washington Irving, my dear friend, who had recently been appointed Minister at the Court of Spain, and who was among them that night, in his new character, for the first and last time before going abroad. I sincerely believe that, in all the madness of American politics, few public men would have been so earnestly, devotedly, and affectionately caressed as this most charming writer: and I have seldom respected a public assembly more than I did this eager throng, when I saw them turning with one mind from noisy orators and officers of state, and flocking with a generous and honest impulse round the man of quiet pursuits: proud in his promotion, as reflecting back upon their country: and grateful to him with their whole hearts for the store of graceful fancies he had poured out among them. Long may he dispense such treasures with unsparing hand; and long may they remember him as worthily!

The term we had assigned for the duration of our stay in Washington was now at an end, and we were to begin to travel; for the railroad distances we had traversed yet, in journeying among these older towns, are on that great continent looked upon as nothing.

I had at first intended going South—to Charleston. But when I came to consider the length of time which this journey would occupy, and the premature heat of the season, which even at Washington had been often very trying; and weighed, moreover, in my own mind, the pain of living in the constant contemplation of slavery, against the more than doubtful chances of my ever seeing it, in the time I had to spare, stripped of the disguises in which it would certainly be dressed, and so adding any item to the host of facts already heaped together on the subject; I began to listen to old whisperings which had often been present to me at home in England, when I little thought of ever being here; and to dream again of cities growing up, like palaces in fairy tales, among the wilds and forests of the west.

The advice I received in most quarters, when I began to yield to my desire of travelling towards that point of the compass, was, according to custom, sufficiently cheerless: my companion being threatened with more perils, dangers, and discomforts than I can remember, or would catalogue if I could; but of which it will be sufficient to remark that blowings-up in steamboats and breakings-down in coaches were among the least. But, having a western route sketched out for me by the best and kindest authority to which I could have resorted, and putting no great faith in these discouragements, I soon determined on my plan of action.

This was to travel south only to Richmond in Virginia; and then to turn, and shape our course for the Far West; whither I beseech the reader's company in a new chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT STEAMER ON THE POTOMAC RIVER. VIRGINIA ROAD, AND A BLACK DRIVER. RICHMOND. BALTIMORE. THE HARRISBURG MAIL, AND A GLIMPSE OF THE CITY. A CANAL BOAT.

WE were to proceed in the first instance by steamboat: and as it is usual to sleep on board, in consequence of the starting hour being four o'clock in the morning, we went down to where she lay, at that very uncomfortable time for such expeditions when slippers are most valuable, and a familiar bed, in the perspective of an hour or two, looks uncommonly pleasant.

It is ten o'clock at night: say half-past ten: moonlight, warm, and dull enough. The steamer (not unlike a child's Noah's ark in form, with the machinery on the top of the roof) is riding lazily up and down, and bumping clumsily against the wooden pier, as the ripple of the river trifles with its unwieldy carcase. The wharf is some distance from the city.

There is nobody down here; and one or two dull lamps upon the steamer's decks are the only signs of life remaining, when our coach has driven away. As soon as our footsteps are heard upon the planks, a fat negress, particularly favoured by nature in respect of bustle, emerges from some dark stairs, and marshals my wife towards the ladies' cabin, to which retreat she goes, followed by a mighty bale of cloaks and great-coats. I valiantly resolve not to go to bed at all, but to walk up and down the pier till morning.

I begin my promenade—thinking of all kinds of distant things and persons, and of nothing near—and pace up and down for half an hour. Then I go on board again: and, getting into the light of one of the lamps, look at my watch, and think it must have stopped; and wonder what has become of the faithful secretary whom I brought along with me from Boston. He is supping with our late landlord (a Field Marshal at least, no doubt) in honour of our departure, and may be two hours longer. I walk again, but it gets duller and duller: the moon goes down: next June seems farther off in the dark, and the echoes of my footsteps make me nervous. It has turned cold, too; and walking up and down without any companion in such lonely circumstances is but poor amusement. So I break my staunch resolution, and think it may be, perhaps, as well to go to bed.

I go on board again; open the door of the gentlemen's cabin; and walk in. Somehow or other—from its being so quiet, I suppose—I have taken it into my head that there is nobody there. To my horror and amazement it is full of sleepers in every stage, shape, attitude, and variety of slumber: in the berths, on the chairs, on the floors, on the tables, and particularly round the stove, my detested enemy. I take another step forward, and slip upon the shining face of a black steward, who lies rolled in a blanket on the floor. He jumps up, grins, half in pain and half in hospitality; whispers my own name in my ear; and, groping among the sleepers, leads me to my berth. Standing beside it, I count these slumbering passengers, and get past forty. There is no use in going further, so I begin to undress. As the chairs are all occupied, and there is nothing else to put my clothes on, I deposit them upon the ground: not without soiling my hands, for it is in the same condition as the carpets in the Capitol, and from the same cause. Having but partially undressed, I clamber on my shelf, and hold the curtain open for a few minutes while I look round on all my fellow-travellers again. That done, I let it fall on them, and on the world: turn round: and go to sleep.

I wake, of course, when we get under way, for there is a good deal of noise. The day is then just breaking. Everybody wakes at the same time. Some are self-possessed directly, and some are much perplexed to make out where they are until they have rubbed their eyes, and, leaning on one elbow, looked about them. Some yawn, some groan, nearly all spit, and a few get up. I am among the risers: for it is easy to feel, without going into fresh air, that the atmosphere of the cabin is vile in the last degree. I huddle on my clothes, go down into the fore-cabin, get shaved by the barber, and wash myself. The washing and dressing apparatus, for the passengers generally, consists of two jack-towels, three small wooden basins, a keg of water and a ladle to serve it out with, six square inches of looking-glass, two ditto ditto of yellow soap, a comb and brush for the head, and nothing for the teeth. Everybody uses the comb and brush, except myself. Everybody stares to see me using my own; and two or three gentlemen are strongly disposed to banter me on my prejudices, but don't. When I have made my toilet, I go upon the hurricane deck, and set in for two hours of hard walking up and down. The sun is rising brilliantly; we are passing Mount Vernon, where Washington lies buried; the river is wide and rapid; and its banks are beautiful. All the glory and splendour of the day are coming on, and growing brighter every minute.

At eight o'clock we breakfast in the cabin where I passed the night, but the windows and doors are all thrown open, and now it is fresh enough. There is no hurry or greediness apparent in the dispatch of the meal. It is longer than a travelling breakfast with us; more orderly; and more polite.

Soon after nine o'clock we come to Potomac Creek, where we are to land; and then comes the oddest part of the journey. Seven stage-coaches are preparing to carry us on. Some of them are ready, some of them are not ready. Some of the drivers are blacks, some whites. There are four horses to each coach, and all the horses, harnessed or unharnessed, are there. The passengers are getting out of the steamboat, and into the coaches; the luggage is being transferred in noisy wheelbarrows; the horses are frightened, and impatient to start; the black drivers are chattering to them like so many monkeys; and the white ones whooping like so many drovers: for the main thing to be done, in all kinds of hostlering here, is to make as

much noise as possible. The coaches are something like the French coaches, but not nearly so good. In lieu of springs, they are hung on bands of the strongest leather. There is very little choice or difference between them; and they may be likened to the car portion of the swings at an English fair, roofed, put upon axle-trees and wheels, and curtained with painted canvas. They are covered with mud from the roof to the wheel-tire, and have never been cleaned since they were first built.

The tickets we have received on board the steamboat are marked No. 1, so we belong to coach No. 1. I throw my coat on the box, and hoist my wife and her maid into the inside. It has only one step, and that being about a yard from the ground, is usually approached by a chair: when there is no chair, ladies trust in Providence. The coach holds nine inside, having a seat across from door to door, where we in England put our legs: so that there is only one feat more difficult in the performance than getting in, and that is getting out again. There is only one outside passenger, and he sits upon the box. As I am that one, I climb up; and while they are strapping the luggage on the roof, and heaping it into a kind of tray behind, have a good opportunity of looking at the driver.

He is a negro—very black indeed. He is dressed in a coarse pepper-and-salt suit excessively patched and darned (particularly at the knees), grey stockings, enormous unblacked high-low shoes, and very short trousers. He has two odd gloves: one of party-coloured worsted, and one of leather. He has a very short whip, broken in the middle, and bandaged up with string. And yet he wears a low-crowned, broad-brimmed, black hat: faintly shadowing forth a kind of insane imitation of an English coachman! But somebody in authority cries "Go ahead!" as I am making these observations. The mail takes the lead in a four-horse waggon, and all the coaches follow in procession: headed by No. 1.

By the way, whenever an Englishman would cry "All right!" an American cries "Go ahead!" which is somewhat expressive of the national character of the two countries.

The first half-mile of the road is over bridges made of loose planks laid across two parallel poles, which tilt up as the wheels roll over them; and IN the river. The river has a clayey bottom, and is full of holes, so that half a horse is constantly disappearing unexpectedly, and can't be found again for some time.

But we get past even this, and come to the road itself, which is a series of alternate swamps and gravel-pits. A tremendous place is close before us, the black driver rolls his eyes, screws his mouth up very round, and looks straight between the two leaders, as if he were saying to himself, "We have done this often before, but *now* I think we shall have a crash." He takes a rein in each hand; jerks and pulls at both; and dances on the splash-board with both feet (keeping his seat, of course) like the late lamented Ducrow on two of his fiery coursers. We come to the spot, sink down in the mire nearly to the coach windows, tilt on one side at an angle of forty-five degrees, and stick there. The insides scream dismally; the coach stops; the horses flounder; all the other six coaches stop; and their four-and-twenty horses flounder likewise: but merely for company, and in sympathy with ours. Then the following circumstances occur.

BLACK DRIVER (to the horses). "Hi!"

Nothing happens. Insides scream again.

BLACK DRIVER (to the horses). "Ho!"

Horses plunge, and splash the black driver.

GENTLEMAN INSIDE (looking out). "Why, what on airth——"

Gentleman receives a variety of splashes, and draws his head in again, without finishing his question or waiting for an answer.

BLACK DRIVER (still to the horses). "Jiddy! Jiddy!"

Horses pull violently, drag the coach out of the hole, and draw it up a bank; so steep that the black driver's legs fly up into the air, and he goes back among the luggage on the roof. But he immediately recovers himself, and cries (still to the horses),

"Pill!"

No effect. On the contrary, the coach begins to roll back upon No. 2, which rolls back upon No. 3, which rolls back upon No. 4, and so on, until No. 7 is heard to curse and swear nearly a quarter of a mile behind.

BLACK DRIVER (louder than before). "Pill!"

Horses make another struggle to get up the bank, and again the coach rolls backward.

BLACK DRIVER (louder than before). "Pe-e-e-ill!"

Horses make a desperate struggle.

BLACK DRIVER (recovering spirits). "Hi! Jiddy, Jiddy, Pill!"

Horses make another effort.

BLACK DRIVER (with great vigour). "Ally Loo! Hi. Jiddy, Jiddy. Pill. Ally Loo!"

Horses almost do it.

BLACK DRIVER (with his eyes starting out of his head). "Lee, den. Lee, dere. Hi. Jiddy, Jiddy. Pill. Ally Loo. Lee-e-e-e-e!"

They run up the bank, and go down again on

the other side at a fearful pace. It is impossible to stop them, and at the bottom there is a deep hollow, full of water. The coach rolls frightfully. The insides scream. The mud and water fly about us. The black driver dances like a madman. Suddenly we are all right by some extraordinary means, and stop to breathe.

A black friend of the black driver is sitting on a fence. The black driver recognises him by twirling his head round and round like a harlequin, rolling his eyes, shrugging his shoulders, and grinning from ear to ear. He stops short, turns to me, and says:

"We shall get you through, sa, like a fiddle, and hope a please you when we get you through, sa. Old 'ooman at home, sa:" chuckling very much. "Outside gentleman, sa, he often remember old 'ooman at home, sa," grinning again.

"Ay, ay, we'll take care of the old woman. Don't be afraid."

The black driver grins again, but there is another hole, and, beyond that, another bank, close before us. So he stops short: cries (to the horses again) "Easy. Easy den. Ease. Steady. Hi. Jiddy. Pill. Ally. Loo," but never "Lee!" until we are reduced to the very last extremity, and are in the midst of difficulties, extrication from which appears to be all but impossible.

And so we do the ten miles or thereabouts in two hours and a half; breaking no bones, though bruising a great many; and, in short, getting through the distance "like a fiddle."

This singular kind of coaching terminates at Fredericksburg, whence there is a railway to Richmond. The tract of country through which it takes its course was once productive: but the soil has been exhausted by the system of employing a great amount of slave labour in forcing crops, without strengthening the land: and it is now little better than a sandy desert overgrown with trees. Dreary and uninteresting as its aspect is, I was glad to the heart to find anything on which one of the curses of this horrible institution has fallen; and had greater pleasure in contemplating the withered ground than the richest and most thriving cultivation in the same place could possibly have afforded me.

In this district, as in all others where slavery sits brooding (I have frequently heard this admitted, even by those who are its warmest advocates), there is an air of ruin and decay abroad, which is inseparable from the system. The barns and outhouses are mouldering away; the sheds are patched and half roofless; the log-cabins (built in Virginia with external chimneys made of clay or wood) are squalid in the last degree. There is no look of decent comfort anywhere. The miserable stations by the railway side; the great wild woodyards, whence the engine is supplied with fuel; the negro children rolling on the ground before the cabin doors, with dogs and pigs; the biped beasts of burden slinking past: gloom and dejection are upon them all.

In the negro car belonging to the train in which we made this journey were a mother and her children who had just been purchased; the husband and father being left behind with their old owner. The children cried the whole way, and the mother was misery's picture. The champion of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, who had bought them, rode in the same train; and, every time we stopped, got down to see that they were safe. The black in Sinbad's Travels, with one eye in the middle of his forehead which shone like a burning coal, was nature's aristocrat compared with this white gentleman.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the evening when we drove to the hotel: in front of which, and on the top of the broad flight of steps leading to the door, two or three citizens were balancing themselves on rocking-chairs, and smoking cigars. We found it a very large and elegant establishment, and were as well entertained as travellers need desire to be. The climate being a thirsty one, there was never, at any hour of the day, a scarcity of loungers in the spacious bar, or a cessation of the mixing of cool liquors: but they were a merrier people here, and had musical instruments playing to them o' nights, which it was a treat to hear again.

The next day, and the next, we rode and walked about the town, which is delightfully situated on eight hills overhanging James River; a sparkling stream, studded here and there with bright islands, or brawling over broken rocks. Although it was yet but the middle of March, the weather in this southern temperature was extremely warm; the peach-trees and magnolias were in full bloom; and the trees were green. In a low ground among the hills is a valley known as "Bloody Run," from a terrible conflict with the Indians which once occurred there. It is a good place for such a struggle, and, like every other spot I saw associated with any legend of that wild people now so rapidly fading from the earth, interested me very much.

The city is the seat of the local Parliament of Virginia; and, in its shady legislative halls, some orators were drowsily holding forth to the hot noonday. By dint of constant repetition,

however, these constitutional sights had very little more interest for me than so many parochial vestries; and I was glad to exchange this one for a lounge in a well-arranged public library of some ten thousand volumes, and a visit to a tobacco manufactory, where the workmen were all slaves.

I saw in this place the whole process of picking, rolling, pressing, drying, packing in casks, and branding. All the tobacco thus dealt with was in course of manufacture for chewing; and one would have supposed there was enough in that one storehouse to have filled even the comprehensive jaws of America. In this form the weed looks like the oil-cake on which we fatten cattle; and, even without reference to its consequences, is sufficiently uninviting.

Many of the workmen appeared to be strong men, and it is hardly necessary to add that they were all labouring quietly then. After two o'clock in the day they are allowed to sing, a certain number at a time. The hour striking while I was there, some twenty sang a hymn in parts, and sang it by no means ill; pursuing their work meanwhile. A bell rang as I was about to leave, and they all poured forth into a building on the opposite side of the street to dinner. I said several times that I should like to see them at their meal; but, as the gentleman to whom I mentioned this desire appeared to be suddenly taken rather deaf, I did not pursue the request. Of their appearance I shall have something to say presently.

On the following day I visited a plantation or farm, of about twelve hundred acres, on the opposite bank of the river. Here again, although I went down with the owner of the estate, to "the quarter," as that part of it in which the slaves live is called, I was not invited to enter into any of their huts. All I saw of them was, that they were very crazy, wretched cabins, near to which groups of half-naked children basked in the sun, or wallowed on the dusty ground. But I believe that this gentleman is a considerate and excellent master, who inherited his fifty slaves, and is neither a buyer nor a seller of human stock; and I am sure, from my own observation and conviction, that he is a kind-hearted, worthy man.

The planter's house was an airy, rustic dwelling, that brought Defoe's description of such places strongly to my recollection. The day was very warm, but the blinds being all closed, and the windows and doors set wide open, a shady coolness rustled through the rooms, which was exquisitely refreshing after the glare and heat without. Before the windows was an open piazza, where, in what they call the hot weather —whatever that may be—they sling hammocks, and drink and doze luxuriously. I do not know how their cool refections may taste within the hammocks, but, having experience, I can report that, out of them, the mounds of ices and the bowls of mint-julep and sherry-cobbler they make in these latitudes, are refreshments never to be thought of afterwards, in summer, by those who would preserve contented minds.

There are two bridges across the river: one belongs to the railroad, and the other, which is a very crazy affair, is the private property of some old lady in the neighbourhood, who levies tolls upon the townspeople. Crossing this bridge on my way back, I saw a notice painted on the gate, cautioning all persons to drive slowly: under a penalty, if the offender were a white man, of five dollars; if a negro, fifteen stripes.

The same decay and gloom that overhang the way by which it is approached, hover above the town of Richmond. There are pretty villas and cheerful houses in its streets, and Nature smiles upon the country round; but jostling its handsome residences, like slavery itself going hand-in-hand with many lofty virtues, are deplorable tenements, fences unrepaired, walls crumbling into ruinous heaps. Hinting gloomily at things below the surface, these, and many other tokens of the same description, force themselves upon the notice, and are remembered with depressing influence, when livelier features are forgotten.

To those who are happily unaccustomed to them, the countenances in the streets and labouring-places, too, are shocking. All men who know that there are laws against instructing slaves, of which the pains and penalties greatly exceed in their amount the fines imposed on those who maim and torture them, must be prepared to find their faces very low in the scale of intellectual expression. But the darkness—not of skin, but mind—which meets the stranger's eye at every turn; the brutalising and blotting out of all fairer characters traced by Nature's hand; immeasurably outdo his worst belief. That travelled creation of the great satirist's brain, who, fresh from living among horses, peered from a high casement down upon his own kind with trembling horror, was scarcely more repelled and daunted by the sight than those who look upon some of these faces for the first time must surely be.

I left the last of them behind me in the person of a wretched drudge, who, after running to and fro all day till midnight, and moping in his stealthy winks of sleep upon the stairs betweenwhiles, was washing the dark passages at four

o'clock in the morning; and went upon my way with a grateful heart that I was not doomed to live where slavery was, and had never had my senses blunted to its wrongs and horrors in a slave-rocked cradle.

It had been my intention to proceed by James River and Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore; but one of the steamboats being absent from her station through some accident, and the means of conveyance being consequently rendered uncertain, we returned to Washington by the way we had come (there were two constables on board the steamboat, in pursuit of runaway slaves), and, halting there again for one night, went on to Baltimore next afternoon.

The most comfortable of all the hotels of which I had any experience in the United States, and they were not a few, is Barnum's, in that city: where the English traveller will find curtains to his bed, for the first and probably the last time in America (this is a disinterested remark, for I never use them); and where he will be likely to have enough water for washing himself, which is not at all a common case.

This capital of the State of Maryland is a bustling, busy town, with a great deal of traffic of various kinds, and in particular of water commerce. That portion of the town which it most favours is none of the cleanest, it is true; but the upper part is of a very different character, and has many agreeable streets and public buildings. The Washington Monument, which is a handsome pillar with a statue on its summit; the Medical College; and the Battle Monument in memory of an engagement with the British at North Point; are the most conspicuous among them.

There is a very good prison in this city, and the State Penitentiary is also among its institutions. In this latter establishment there were two curious cases.

One was that of a young man who had been tried for the murder of his father. The evidence was entirely circumstantial, and was very conflicting and doubtful; nor was it possible to assign any motive which could have tempted him to the commission of so tremendous a crime. He had been tried twice; and, on the second occasion, the jury felt so much hesitation in convicting him, that they found a verdict of manslaughter, or murder in the second degree; which it could not possibly be, as there had, beyond all doubt, been no quarrel or provocation, and if he were guilty at all, he was unquestionably guilty of murder in its broadest and worst signification.

The remarkable feature in the case was, that if the unfortunate deceased were not really murdered by this own son of his, he must have been murdered by his own brother. The evidence lay, in a most remarkable manner, between those two. On all the suspicious points, the dead man's brother was the witness; all the explanations for the prisoner (some of them extremely plausible) went, by construction and inference, to inculpate him as plotting to fix the guilt upon his nephew. It must have been one of them; and the jury had to decide between two sets of suspicions, almost equally unnatural, unaccountable, and strange.

The other case was that of a man who once went to a certain distiller's, and stole a copper measure containing a quantity of liquor. He was pursued and taken with the property in his possession, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On coming out of the gaol at the expiration of that term, he went back to the same distiller's, and stole the same copper measure, containing the same quantity of liquor. There was not the slightest reason to suppose that the man wished to return to prison: indeed, everything, but the commission of the offence, made directly against that assumption. There are only two ways of accounting for this extraordinary proceeding. One is that, after undergoing so much for this copper measure, he conceived he had established a sort of claim and right to it. The other that, by dint of long thinking about, it had become a monomania with him, and had acquired a fascination which he found it impossible to resist: swelling from an Earthly Copper Gallon into an Ethereal Golden Vat.

After remaining here a couple of days, I bound myself to a rigid adherence to the plan I had laid down so recently, and resolved to set forward on our western journey without any more delay. Accordingly, having reduced the luggage within the smallest possible compass (by sending back to New York, to be afterwards forwarded to us in Canada, so much of it as was not absolutely wanted); and having procured the necessary credentials to banking-houses on the way; and having, moreover, looked for two evenings at the setting sun, with as well-defined an idea of the country before us as if we had been going to travel into the very centre of that planet; we left Baltimore by another railway at half-past eight in the morning, and reached the town of York, some sixty miles off, by the early dinner-time of the hotel which was the starting-place of the four-horse coach wherein we were to proceed to Harrisburg.

This conveyance, the box of which I was for-

tunate enough to secure, had come down to meet us at the railroad station, and was as muddy and cumbersome as usual. As more passengers were waiting for us at the inn door, the coachman observed under his breath, in the usual self-communicative voice, looking the while at his mouldy harness as if it were to that he was addressing himself,

"I expect we shall want *the big* coach."

I could not help wondering within myself what the size of this big coach might be, and how many persons it might be designed to hold; for the vehicle which was too small for our purpose was something larger than two English heavy night coaches, and might have been the twin brother of a French Diligence. My speculations were speedily set at rest, however; for, as soon as we had dined, there came rumbling up the street, shaking its sides like a corpulent giant, a kind of barge on wheels. After much blundering and backing, it stopped at the door: rolling heavily from side to side, when its other motion had ceased, as if it had taken cold in its damp stable, and between that, and the having been required in its dropsical old age to move at any faster pace than a walk, were distressed by shortness of wind.

"If here ain't the Harrisburg mail at last, and dreadful bright and smart to look at too," cried an elderly gentleman in some excitement, "darn my mother!"

I don't know what the sensation of being darned may be, or whether a man's mother has a keener relish or disrelish of the process than anybody else; but if the endurance of this mysterious ceremony by the old lady in question had depended on the accuracy of her son's vision in respect to the abstract brightness and smartness of the Harrisburg mail, she would certainly have undergone its infliction. However, they booked twelve people inside; and the luggage (including such trifles as a large rocking-chair and a good-sized dining-table) being at length made fast upon the roof, we started off in great state.

At the door of another hotel there was another passenger to be taken up.

"Any room, sir?" cries the new passenger to the coachman.

"Well, there's room enough," replies the coachman, without getting down, or even looking at him.

"There ain't no room at all, sir," bawls a gentleman inside. Which another gentleman (also inside) confirms, by predicting that the attempt to introduce any more passengers "won't fit nohow."

The new passenger, without any expression of anxiety, looks into the coach, and then looks up at the coachman. "Now, how do you mean to fix it?" says he after a pause: "for I *must* go."

The coachman employs himself in twisting the lash of his whip into a knot, and takes no more notice of the question: clearly signifying that it is anybody's business but his, and that the passengers would do well to fix it among themselves. In this state of things, matters seem to be approximating to a fix of another kind, when another inside passenger in a corner, who is nearly suffocated, cries faintly,

"I'll get out."

This is no matter of relief or self-congratulation to the driver, for his immovable philosophy is perfectly undisturbed by anything that happens in the coach. Of all things in the world, the coach would seem to be the very last upon his mind. The exchange is made, however, and then the passenger who has given up his seat makes a third upon the box, seating himself in what he calls the middle: that is, with half his person on my legs, and the other half on the driver's.

"Go ahead, cap'en," cries the colonel, who directs.

"Go-lang!" cries the cap'en to his company, the horses, and away we go.

We took up at a rural bar-room, after we had gone a few miles, an intoxicated gentleman who climbed upon the roof among the luggage, and subsequently slipping off without hurting himself, was seen in the distant perspective reeling back to the grog-shop where we had found him. We also parted with more of our freight at different times, so that when we came to change horses, I was again alone outside.

The coachmen always change with the horses, and are usually as dirty as the coach. The first was dressed like a very shabby English baker; the second like a Russian peasant: for he wore a loose purple camlet robe with a fur collar, tied round his waist with a party-coloured worsted sash; grey trousers; light blue gloves; and a cap of bear-skin. It had by this time come on to rain very heavily, and there was a cold damp mist besides, which penetrated to the skin. I was very glad to take advantage of a stoppage, and get down to stretch my legs, shake the water off my great-coat, and swallow the usual anti-temperance recipe for keeping out the cold.

When I mounted to my seat again, I observed a new parcel lying on the coach roof, which I took to be a rather large fiddle in a brown bag.

In the course of a few miles, however, I discovered that it had a glazed cap at one end and a pair of muddy shoes at the other; and further observation demonstrated it to be a small boy in a snuff-coloured coat, with his arms quite pinioned to his sides, by deep forcing into his pockets. He was, I presume, a relative or friend of the coachman's, as he lay atop of the luggage, with his face towards the rain; and, except when a change of position brought his shoes in contact with my hat, he appeared to be asleep. At last, on some occasion of our stopping, this thing slowly upreared itself to the height of three feet six, and fixing its eyes on me, observed in piping accents, with a complaisant yawn, half quenched in an obliging air of friendly patronage, "Well now, stranger, I guess you find this a'most like an English arternoon, hey?"

The scenery, which had been tame enough at first, was, for the last ten or twelve miles, beautiful. Our road wound through the pleasant valley of the Susquehanna; the river, dotted with innumerable green islands, lay upon our right; and on the left, a steep ascent, craggy with broken rock, and dark with pine-trees. The mist, wreathing itself into a hundred fantastic shapes, moved solemnly upon the water; and the gloom of evening gave to all an air of mystery and silence which greatly enhanced its natural interest.

We crossed this river by a wooden bridge, roofed and covered in on all sides, and nearly a mile in length. It was profoundly dark; perplexed, with great beams crossing and recrossing it at every possible angle; and through the broad chinks and crevices of the floor the rapid river gleamed, far down below, like a legion of eyes. We had no lamps; and as the horses stumbled and floundered through this place, towards the distant speck of dying light, it seemed interminable. I really could not at first persuade myself, as we rumbled heavily on, filling the bridge with hollow noises, and I held down my head to save it from the rafters above, but that I was in a painful dream; for I have often dreamed of toiling through such places, and as often argued, even at the time, "this cannot be reality."

At length, however, we emerged upon the streets of Harrisburg, whose feeble lights, reflected dismally from the wet ground, did not shine out upon a very cheerful city. We were soon established in a snug hotel, which, though smaller and far less splendid than many we put up at, is raised above them all in my remembrance, by having for its landlord the most obliging, considerate, and gentlemanly person I ever had to deal with.

As we were not to proceed upon our journey until the afternoon, I walked out, after breakfast the next morning, to look about me; and was duly shown a model prison on the solitary system, just erected, and as yet without an inmate; the trunk of an old tree to which Harris, the first settler here (afterwards buried under it) was tied by hostile Indians, with his funeral pile about him, when he was saved by the timely appearance of a friendly party on the opposite shore of the river; the local legislature (for there was another of those bodies here, again, in full debate); and the other curiosities of the town.

I was very much interested in looking over a number of treaties made from time to time with the poor Indians, signed by the different chiefs at the period of their ratification, and preserved in the office of the Secretary to the Commonwealth. These signatures, traced of course by their own hands, are rough drawings of the creatures or weapons they were called after. Thus, the Great Turtle makes a crooked pen-and-ink outline of a great turtle; the Buffalo sketches a buffalo; the War Hatchet sets a rough image of that weapon for his mark. So with the Arrow, the Fish, the Scalp, the Big Canoe, and all of them.

I could not but think—as I looked at these feeble and tremulous productions of hands which could draw the longest arrow to the head in a stout elk-horn bow, or split a bead or feather with a rifle ball—of Crabbe's musings over the Parish Register, and the irregular scratches made with a pen by men who would plough a lengthy furrow straight from end to end. Nor could I help bestowing many sorrowful thoughts upon the simple warriors whose hands and hearts were set there in all truth and honesty; and who only learned in course of time from white men how to break their faith, and quibble out of forms and bonds. I wondered, too, how many times the credulous Big Turtle, or trusting Little Hatchet, had put his mark to treaties which were falsely read to him; and had signed away, he knew not what, until it went and cast him loose upon the new possessors of the land, a savage indeed.

Our host announced, before our early dinner, that some members of the legislative body proposed to do us the honour of calling. He had kindly yielded up to us his wife's own little parlour, and when I begged that he would show them in, I saw him look with painful apprehension at its pretty carpet; though, being other-

wise occupied at the time, the cause of his uneasiness did not occur to me.

It certainly would have been more pleasant to all parties concerned, and would not, I think, have compromised their independence in any material degree, if some of these gentlemen had not only yielded to the prejudice in favour of spittoons, but had abandoned themselves, for the moment, even to the conventional absurdity of pocket-handkerchiefs.

It still continued to rain heavily, and when we went down to the Canal Boat (for that was the mode of conveyance by which we were to proceed) after dinner, the weather was as unpromising and obstinately wet as one would desire to see. Nor was the sight of this canal boat, in which we were to spend three or four days, by any means a cheerful one; as it involved some uneasy speculations concerning the disposal of the passengers at night, and opened a wide field of inquiry touching the other domestic arrangements of the establishment, which was sufficiently disconcerting.

However, there it was—a barge with a little house in it, viewed from the outside; and a caravan at a fair, viewed from within: the gentlemen being accommodated as the spectators usually are in one of those locomotive museums of penny wonders; and the ladies being partitioned off by a red curtain, after the manner of the dwarfs and giants in the same establishments, whose private lives are passed in rather close exclusiveness.

We sat here, looking silently at the row of little tables which extended down both sides of the cabin, and listening to the rain as it dripped and pattered on the boat, and plashed with a dismal merriment in the water, until the arrival of the railway train, for whose final contribution to our stock of passengers our departure was alone deferred. It brought a great many boxes, which were bumped and tossed upon the roof, almost as painfully as if they had been deposited on one's own head, without the intervention of a porter's knot; and several damp gentlemen, whose clothes, on their drawing round the stove, began to steam again. No doubt it would have been a thought more comfortable if the driving rain, which now poured down more soakingly than ever, had admitted of a window being opened, or if our number had been something less than thirty: but there was scarcely time to think as much, when a train of three horses was attached to the tow-rope, the boy upon the leader smacked his whip, the rudder creaked and groaned complainingly, and we had begun our journey.

CHAPTER X.

SOME FURTHER ACCOUNT OF THE CANAL BOAT, ITS DOMESTIC ECONOMY, AND ITS PASSENGERS. JOURNEY TO PITTSBURG ACROSS THE ALLEGHANY MOUNTAINS. PITTSBURG.

As it continued to rain most perseveringly, we all remained below: the damp gentlemen round the stove gradually becoming mildewed by the action of the fire: and the dry gentlemen lying at full length upon the seats, or slumbering uneasily with their faces on the tables, or walking up and down the cabin, which it was barely possible for a man of the middle height to do without making bald places on his head by scraping it against the roof. At about six o'clock all the small tables were put together to form one long table, and everybody sat down to tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black puddings, and sausages.

"Will you try," said my opposite neighbour, handing me a dish of potatoes broken up in milk and butter, "will you try some of these fixings?"

There are few words which perform such various duties as this word "fix." It is the Caleb Quotem of the American vocabulary. You call upon a gentleman in a country town, and his help informs you that he is "fixing himself" just now, but will be down directly: by which you are to understand that he is dressing. You inquire, on board a steamboat, of a fellow-passenger, whether breakfast will be ready soon, and he tells you he should think so, for when he was last below, they were "fixing the tables:" in other words, laying the cloth. You beg a porter to collect your luggage, and he entreats you not to be uneasy, for he'll "fix it presently:" and if you complain of indisposition, you are advised to have recourse to Doctor So-and-so, who will "fix you" in no time.

One night I ordered a bottle of mulled wine at an hotel where I was staying, and waited a long time for it; at length it was put upon the table, with an apology from the landlord that he feared it wasn't "fixed properly." And I recollect once, at a stage-coach dinner, overhearing a very stern gentleman demand of a waiter who presented him with a plate of underdone roast beef, "whether he called *that* fixing God A'mighty's vittles?"

There is no doubt that the meal, at which the invitation was tendered to me which has occa-

sioned this digression, was disposed of somewhat ravenously; and that the gentlemen thrust the broad-bladed knives and the two-pronged forks further down their throats than I ever saw the same weapons go before, except in the hands of a skilful juggler: but no man sat down until the ladies were seated; or omitted any little act of politeness which could contribute to their comfort. Nor did I ever once, on any occasion, anywhere, during my rambles in America, see a woman exposed to the slightest act of rudeness, incivility, or even inattention.

By the time the meal was over, the rain, which seemed to have worn itself out by coming down so fast, was nearly over too; and it became feasible to go on deck: which was a great relief, notwithstanding its being a very small deck, and being rendered still smaller by the luggage, which was heaped together in the middle under a tarpaulin covering; leaving, on either side, a path so narrow, that it became a science to walk to and fro without tumbling overboard into the canal. It was somewhat embarrassing at first, too, to have to duck nimbly every five minutes whenever the man at the helm cried "Bridge!" and sometimes, when the cry was "Low Bridge," to lie down nearly flat. But custom familiarises one to anything, and there were so many bridges that it took a very short time to get used to this.

As night came on, and we drew in sight of the first range of hills, which are the outposts of the Alleghany Mountains, the scenery, which had been uninteresting hitherto, became more bold and striking. The wet ground reeked and smoked after the heavy fall of rain; and the croaking of the frogs (whose noise in these parts is almost incredible) sounded as though a million of fairy teams with bells were travelling through the air and keeping pace with us. The night was cloudy yet, but moonlight too: and when we crossed the Susquehanna River—over which there is an extraordinary wooden bridge with two galleries, one above the other, so that, even there, two boat-teams meeting may pass without confusion—it was wild and grand.

I have mentioned my having been in some uncertainty and doubt, at first, relative to the sleeping arrangements on board this boat. I remained in the same vague state of mind until ten o'clock or thereabouts, when, going below, I found suspended, on either side of the cabin, three long tiers of hanging bookshelves, designed apparently for volumes of the small octavo size. Looking with greater attention at these contrivances (wondering to find such literary preparations in such a place), I descried on each shelf a sort of microscopic sheet and blanket; then I began dimly to comprehend that the passengers were the library, and that they were to be arranged edge-wise on these shelves till morning.

I was assisted to this conclusion by seeing some of them gather round the master of the boat at one of the tables, drawing lots with all the anxieties and passions of gamesters depicted in their countenances; while others, with small pieces of cardboard in their hands, were groping among the shelves in search of numbers corresponding with those they had drawn. As soon as any gentleman found his number, he took possession of it by immediately undressing himself and crawling into bed. The rapidity with which an agitated gambler subsided into a snoring slumberer was one of the most singular effects I have ever witnessed. As to the ladies, they were already abed, behind the red curtain, which was carefully drawn and pinned up the centre; though as every cough, or sneeze, or whisper, behind this curtain, was perfectly audible before it, we had still a lively consciousness of their society.

The politeness of the person in authority had secured to me a shelf in a nook near this red curtain, in some degree removed from the great body of sleepers: to which place I retired, with many acknowledgments to him for his attention. I found it, on after-measurement, just the width of an ordinary sheet of Bath post letter-paper; and I was at first in some uncertainty as to the best means of getting into it. But the shelf being a bottom one, I finally determined on lying upon the floor, rolling gently in, stopping immediately I touched the mattress, and remaining for the night with that side uppermost, whatever it might be. Luckily, I came upon my back at exactly the right moment. I was much alarmed, on looking upward, to see, by the shape of his half-yard of sacking (which his weight had bent into an exceedingly tight bag), that there was a very heavy gentleman above me, whom the slender cords seemed quite incapable of holding; and I could not help reflecting upon the grief of my wife and family in the event of his coming down in the night. But, as I could not have got up again without a severe bodily struggle, which might have alarmed the ladies; and as I had nowhere to go to even if I had; I shut my eyes upon the danger, and remained there.

One of two remarkable circumstances is indisputably a fact, with reference to that class of society who travel in these boats. Either they carry their restlessness to such a pitch that they

never sleep at all; or they expectorate in dreams, which would be a remarkable mingling of the real and ideal. All night long, and every night, on this canal, there was a perfect storm and tempest of spitting; and once my coat, being in the very centre of a hurricane sustained by five gentlemen (which moved vertically, strictly carrying out Reid's Theory of the Law of Storms), I was fain the next morning to lay it on the deck, and rub it down with fair water before it was in a condition to be worn again.

Between five and six o'clock in the morning we got up, and some of us went on deck, to give them an opportunity of taking the shelves down; while others, the morning being very cold, crowded round the rusty stove, cherishing the newly-kindled fire, and filling the grate with those voluntary contributions of which they had been so liberal all night. The washing accommodations were primitive. There was a tin ladle chained to the deck, with which every gentleman who thought it necessary to cleanse himself (many were superior to this weakness) fished the dirty water out of the canal, and poured it into a tin basin, secured in like manner. There was also a jack-towel. And, hanging up before a little looking-glass in the bar, in the immediate vicinity of the bread and cheese and biscuits, were a public comb and hair-brush.

At eight o'clock, the shelves being taken down and put away, and the tables joined together, everybody sat down to the tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black puddings, and sausages, all over again. Some were fond of compounding this variety, and having it all on their plates at once. As each gentleman got through his own personal amount of tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black puddings, and sausages, he rose up and walked off. When everybody had done with everything, the fragments were cleared away: and one of the waiters, appearing anew in the character of a barber, shaved such of the company as desired to be shaved; while the remainder looked on, or yawned over their newspapers. Dinner was breakfast again, without the tea and coffee; and supper and breakfast were identical.

There was a man on board this boat with a light, fresh-coloured face, and a pepper-and-salt suit of clothes, who was the most inquisitive fellow that can possibly be imagined. He never spoke otherwise than interrogatively. He was an embodied inquiry. Sitting down or standing up, still or moving, walking the deck or taking his meals, there he was, with a great note of interrogation in each eye, two in his cocked ears, two more in his turned-up nose and chin, at least half-a-dozen more about the corners of his mouth, and the largest one of all in his hair, which was brushed pertly off his forehead in a flaxen clump. Every button in his clothes said, "Eh? What's that? Did you speak? Say that again, will you?" He was always wide awake, like the enchanted bride who drove her husband frantic; always restless; always thirsting for answers; perpetually seeking and never finding. There never was such a curious man.

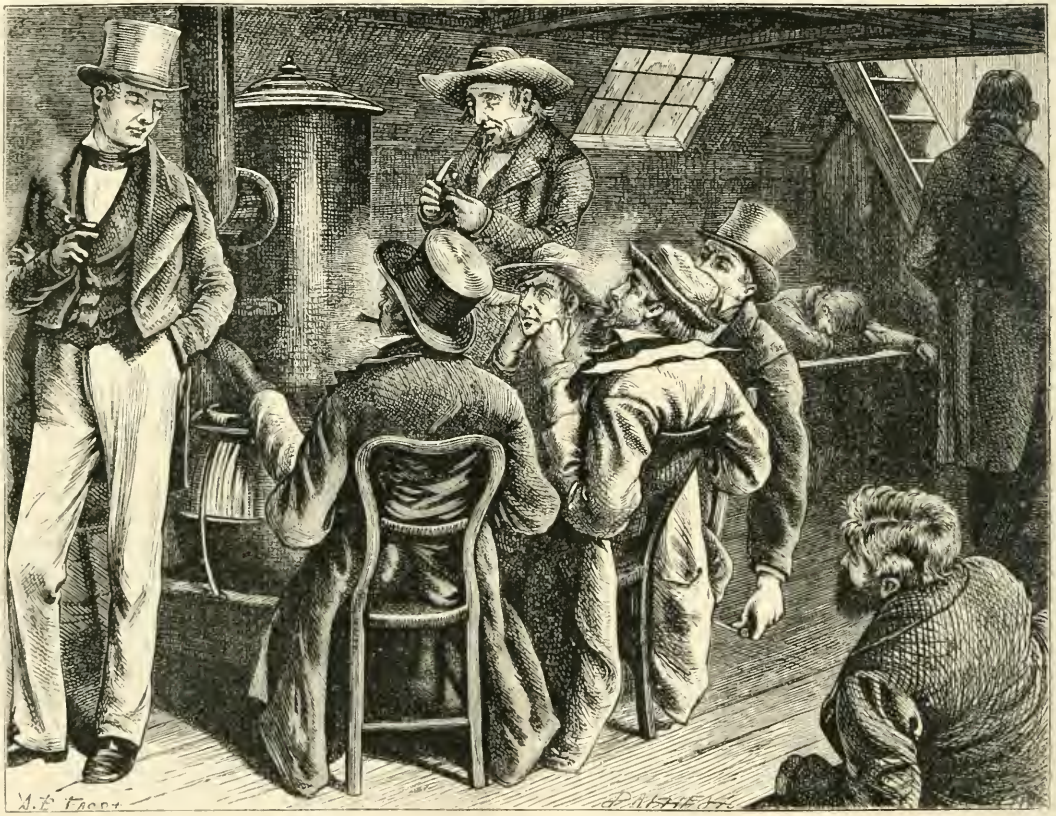
I wore a fur great-coat at that time, and, before we were well clear of the wharf, he questioned me concerning it, and its price, and where I bought it, and when, and what fur it was, and what it weighed, and what it cost. Then he took notice of my watch, and asked what *that* cost, and whether it was a French watch, and where I got it, and how I got it, and whether I bought it or had it given me, and how it went, and where the keyhole was, and when I wound it, every night or every morning, and whether I ever forgot to wind it at all, and if I did, what then? Where had I been to last, and where was I going next, and where was I going after that, and had I seen the President, and what did he say, and what did I say, and what did he say when I had said that? Eh? Lor, now! do tell!

Finding that nothing would satisfy him, I evaded his questions after the first score or two, and in particular pleaded ignorance respecting the name of the fur whereof the coat was made. I am unable to say whether this was the reason, but that coat fascinated him ever afterwards; he usually kept close behind me as I walked, and moved as I moved, that he might look at it the better; and he frequently dived into narrow places after me at the risk of his life, that he might have the satisfaction of passing his hand up the back, and rubbing it the wrong way.

We had another odd specimen on board of a different kind. This was a thin-faced, spare-figured man of middle age and stature, dressed in a dusty drabbish-coloured suit, such as I never saw before. He was perfectly quiet during the first part of the journey: indeed, I don't remember having so much as seen him until he was brought out by circumstances, as great men often are. The conjunction of events which made him famous happened, briefly, thus.

The canal extends to the foot of the mountain, and there, of course, it stops; the passengers being conveyed across it by land carriage, and taken on afterwards by another canal

boat, the counterpart of the first, which awaits them on the other side. There are two canal lines of passage boats; one is called the Express, and one (a cheaper one) the Pioneer. The Pioneer gets first to the mountain, and waits for the Express people to come up; both sets of passengers being conveyed across it at the same time. We were the Express company; but when we had crossed the mountain, and had come to the second boat, the proprietors took it into their heads to draft all the Pioneers into it likewise, so that we were five-and-forty at least, and the accession of passengers was not at all of that kind which improved the prospect of sleeping at night. Our people grumbled at this, as people do in such cases; but suffered the boat to be towed off with the whole freight aboard nevertheless; and away we went down the canal. At home I should have protested lustily, but, being a foreigner here, I held my peace. Not so this passenger. He cleft a path among the people on deck (we were nearly all



IN THE CABIN OF THE CANAL BOAT.

on deck), and, without addressing anybody whomsoever, soliloquised as follows:

"This may suit *you*, this may, but it don't suit *me*. This may be all very well with Down Easters, and men of Boston raising, but it won't suit my figure nohow; and no two ways about *that*; and so I tell you. Now! I'm from the brown forests of the Mississippi, *I* am, and when the sun shines on me, it does shine—a little. It don't glimmer where *I* live, the sun don't. No. I'm a brown forester, I am. I an't a Johnny Cake. There are no smooth skins where I live. We're rough men there. Rather. If Down Easters and men of Boston raising like this, I'm glad of it, but I'm none of that raising nor of that breed. No. This company wants a little fixing, *it* does. I'm the wrong sort of man for 'em, *I* am. They won't like me, *they* won't. This is piling of it up a little too mŏŭntaĭnoŭs, this is." At the end of every one of these short sentences he turned upon his heel, and walked the other way;

checking himself abruptly when he had finished another short sentence, and turning back again.

It is impossible for me to say what terrific meaning was hidden in the words of this brown forester, but I know that the other passengers looked on in a sort of admiring horror, and that presently the boat was put back to the wharf, and as many of the Pioneers as could be coaxed or bullied into going away were got rid of.

When we started again, some of the boldest spirits on board made bold to say to the obvious occasion of this improvement in our prospects, "Much obliged to you, sir:" whereunto the brown forester (waving his hand, and still walking up and down as before), replied, "No, you an't. You're none o' my raising. You may act for yourselves, *you* may. I have pinted out the way. Down Easters and Johnny Cakes can follow if they please. I an't a Johnny Cake, *I* an't. I am from the brown forests of the Mississippi, *I* am"—and so on, as before. He was unanimously voted one of the tables for his bed at night—there is a great contest for the tables—in consideration of his public services: and he had the warmest corner by the stove throughout the rest of the journey. But I never could find out that he did anything except sit there; nor did I hear him speak again until, in the midst of the bustle and turmoil of getting the luggage ashore in the dark at Pittsburg, I stumbled over him as he sat smoking a cigar on the cabin steps, and heard him muttering to himself, with a short laugh of defiance, "I an't a Johnny Cake, *I* an't. I'm from the brown forests of the Mississippi, *I* am, damme!" I am inclined to argue, from this, that he had never left off saying so; but I could not make affidavit of that part of the story, if required to do so by my Queen and Country.

As we have not reached Pittsburg yet, however, in the order of our narrative, I may go on to remark that breakfast was perhaps the least desirable meal of the day, as, in addition to the many savoury odours arising from the eatables already mentioned, there were whiffs of gin, whiskey, brandy, and rum from the little bar hard by, and a decided seasoning of stale tobacco. Many of the gentlemen passengers were far from particular in respect of their linen, which was in some cases as yellow as the little rivulets that had trickled from the corners of their mouths in chewing, and dried there. Nor was the atmosphere quite free from zephyr whisperings of the thirty beds which had just been cleared away, and of which we were further and more pressingly reminded by the occasional appearance on the table-cloth of a kind of Game not mentioned in the Bill of Fare.

And yet despite these oddities—and even they had, for me at least, a humour of their own—there was much in this mode of travelling which I heartily enjoyed at the time, and look back upon with great pleasure. Even the running up, bare-necked, at five o'clock in the morning, from the tainted cabin to the dirty deck; scooping up the icy water, plunging one's head into it, and drawing it out all fresh and glowing with the cold; was a good thing. The fast, brisk walk upon the towing-path, between that time and breakfast, when every vein and artery seemed to tingle with health; the exquisite beauty of the opening day, when light came gleaming off from everything; the lazy motion of the boat, when one lay idly on the deck, looking through, rather than at, the deep blue sky; the gliding on at night, so noiselessly, past frowning hills, sullen with dark trees, and sometimes angry in one red burning spot high up, where unseen men lay crouching round a fire; the shining out of the bright stars, undisturbed by noise of wheels or steam, or any other sound than the liquid rippling of the water as the boat went on: all these were pure delights.

Then, there were new settlements and detached log-cabins and frame-houses, full of interest for strangers from an old country: cabins with simple ovens, outside, made of clay; and lodgings for the pigs nearly as good as many of the human quarters; broken windows, patched with worn-out hats, old clothes, old boards, fragments of blankets and paper; and home-made dressers standing in the open air without the door, whereon was ranged the household store, not hard to count, of earthen jars and pots. The eye was pained to see the stumps of great trees thickly strewn in every field of wheat, and seldom to lose the eternal swamp and dull morass, with hundreds of rotten trunks and twisted branches steeped in its unwholesome water. It was quite sad and oppressive to come upon great tracts where settlers had been burning down the trees, and where their wounded bodies lay about like those of murdered creatures, while here and there some charred and blackened giant reared aloft two withered arms, and seemed to call down curses on his foes. Sometimes, at night, the way wound through some lonely gorge, like a mountain pass in Scotland, shining and coldly glittering in the light of the moon, and so closed in by high steep hills all round, that there seemed to be no egress save through the narrower path by which we had

come, until one rugged hill-side seemed to open, and, shutting out the moonlight as we passed into its gloomy throat, wrapped our new course in shade and darkness.

We had left Harrisburg on Friday. On Sunday morning we arrived at the foot of the mountain, which is crossed by railroad. There are ten inclined planes; five *a*scending, and five *de*scending; the carriages are dragged up the former, and let slowly down the latter, by means of stationary engines; the comparatively level spaces between being traversed, sometimes by horse, and sometimes by engine power, as the case demands. Occasionally the rails are laid upon the extreme verge of a giddy precipice; and looking from the carriage window, the traveller gazes sheer down, without a stone or scrap of fence between, into the mountain depths below. The journey is very carefully made, however; only two carriages travelling together; and, while proper precautions are taken, is not to be dreaded for its dangers.

It was very pretty, travelling thus at a rapid pace along the heights of the mountain in a keen wind, to look down into a valley full of light and softness; catching glimpses, through the tree-tops, of scattered cabins; children running to the doors; dogs bursting out to bark, whom we could see without hearing; terrified pigs scampering homewards; families sitting out in their rude gardens; cows gazing upward with a stupid indifference; men in their shirt-sleeves, looking on at their unfinished houses, planning out to-morrow's work; and we riding onward, high above them, like a whirlwind. It was amusing, too, when we had dined, and rattled down a steep pass, having no other moving power than the weight of the carriages themselves, to see the engine, released long after us, come buzzing down alone, like a great insect, its back of green and gold so shining in the sun, that if it had spread a pair of wings and soared away, no one would have had occasion, as I fancied, for the least surprise. But it stopped short of us in a very business-like manner when we reached the canal; and, before we left the wharf, went panting up this hill again, with the passengers who had waited our arrival for the means of traversing the road by which we had come.

On the Monday evening, furnace fires and clanking hammers on the banks of the canal warned us that we approached the termination of this part of our journey. After going through another dreamy place—a long aqueduct across the Alleghany River, which was stranger than the bridge at Harrisburg, being a vast, low, wooden chamber full of water—we emerged upon that ugly confusion of backs of buildings and crazy galleries and stairs which always abuts on water, whether it be river, sea, canal, or ditch: and were at Pittsburg.

Pittsburg is like Birmingham in England; at least, its townspeople say so. Setting aside the streets, the shops, the houses, waggons, factories, public buildings, and population, perhaps it may be. It certainly has a great quantity of smoke hanging about it, and is famous for its iron-works. Besides the prison to which I have already referred, this town contains a pretty arsenal and other institutions. It is very beautifully situated on the Alleghany River, over which there are two bridges; and the villas of the wealthier citizens, sprinkled about the high grounds in the neighbourhood, are pretty enough. We lodged at a most excellent hotel, and were admirably served. As usual, it was full of boarders, was very large, and had a broad colonnade to every story of the house.

We tarried here three days. Our next point was Cincinnati: and as this was a steamboat journey, and western steamboats usually blow up one or two a week in the season, it was advisable to collect opinions in reference to the comparative safety of the vessels bound that way, then lying in the river. One called the Messenger was the best recommended. She had been advertised to start positively every day for a fortnight or so, and had not gone yet, nor did her captain seem to have any very fixed intention on the subject. But this is the custom: for if the law were to bind down a free and independent citizen to keep his word with the public, what would become of the liberty of the subject? Besides, it is in the way of trade. And if passengers be decoyed in the way of trade, and people be inconvenienced in the way of trade, what man, who is a sharp tradesman himself, shall say, "We must put a stop to this?"

Impressed by the deep solemnity of the public announcement, I (being then ignorant of these usages) was for hurrying on board in a breathless state immediately; but receiving private and confidential information that the boat would certainly not start until Friday, April the First, we made ourselves very comfortable in the meanwhile, and went on board at noon that day.

CHAPTER XI.

FROM PITTSBURG TO CINCINNATI IN A WESTERN STEAMBOAT. CINCINNATI.

THE Messenger was one among a crowd of high-pressure steamboats clustered together by the wharf-side, which, looked down upon from the rising ground that forms the landing-place, and backed by the lofty bank on the opposite side of the river, appeared no larger than so many floating models. She had some forty passengers on board, exclusive of the poorer persons on the lower deck; and in half an hour, or less, proceeded on her way.

We had, for ourselves, a tiny state-room with two berths in it, opening out of the ladies' cabin. There was, undoubtedly, something satisfactory in this "location," inasmuch as it was in the stern, and we had been a great many times very gravely recommended to keep as far aft as possible, "because the steamboats generally blew up forward." Nor was this an unnecessary caution, as the occurrence and circumstances of more than one such fatality during our stay sufficiently testified. Apart from this source of self-congratulation, it was an unspeakable relief to have any place, no matter how confined, where one could be alone: and as the row of little chambers, of which this was one, had each a second glass door besides that in the ladies' cabin, which opened on a narrow gallery outside the vessel, where the other passengers seldom came, and where one could sit in peace and gaze upon the shifting prospect, we took possession of our new quarters with much pleasure.

If the native packets I have already described be unlike anything we are in the habit of seeing on water, these western vessels are still more foreign to all the ideas we are accustomed to entertain of boats. I hardly know what to liken them to, or how to describe them.

In the first place, they have no mast, cordage, tackle, rigging, or other such boat-like gear; nor have they anything in their shape at all calculated to remind one of a boat's head, stern, sides, or keel. Except that they are in the water, and display a couple of paddle-boxes, they might be intended, for anything that appears to the contrary, to perform some unknown service, high and dry, upon a mountain-top. There is no visible deck even: nothing but a long, black, ugly roof, covered with burnt-out feathery sparks; above which tower two iron chimneys, and a hoarse escape valve, and a glass steerage house. Then, in order as the eye descends towards the water, are the sides, and doors, and windows of the state-rooms, jumbled as oddly together as though they formed a small street, built by the varying tastes of a dozen men: the whole is supported on beams and pillars resting on a dirty barge, but a few inches above the water's edge: and in the narrow space between this upper structure and this barge's deck are the furnace fires and machinery, open at the sides to every wind that blows, and every storm of rain it drives along its path.

Passing one of these boats at night, and seeing the great body of fire, exposed as I have just described, that rages and roars beneath the frail pile of painted wood: the machinery not warded off or guarded in any way, but doing its work in the midst of the crowd of idlers and emigrants and children who throng the lower deck: under the management, too, of reckless men whose acquaintance with its mysteries may have been of six months' standing: one feels directly that the wonder is, not that there should be so many fatal accidents, but that any journey should be safely made.

Within, there is one long narrow cabin, the whole length of the boat; from which the state-rooms open on both sides. A small portion of it at the stern is partitioned off for the ladies; and the bar is at the opposite extreme. There is a long table down the centre, and at either end a stove. The washing apparatus is forward, on the deck. It is a little better than on board the canal boat, but not much. In all modes of travelling, the American customs, with reference to the means of personal cleanliness and wholesome ablution, are extremely negligent and filthy; and I strongly incline to the belief that a considerable amount of illness is referable to this cause.

We are to be on board the Messenger three days: arriving at Cincinnati (barring accidents) on Monday morning. There are three meals a day. Breakfast at seven, dinner at half-past twelve, supper about six. At each there are a great many small dishes and plates upon the table, with very little in them; so that, although there is every appearance of a mighty "spread," there is seldom really more than a joint: except for those who fancy slices of beet-root, shreds of dried beef, complicated entanglements of yellow pickle, maize, Indian corn, apple sauce, and pumpkin.

Some people fancy all these little dainties together (and sweet preserves besides), by way of relish to their roast pig. They are generally

those dyspeptic ladies and gentlemen who eat unheard-of quantities of hot corn bread (almost as good for the digestion as a kneaded pincushion) for breakfast and for supper. Those who do not observe this custom, and who help themselves several times instead, usually suck their knives and forks meditatively until they have decided what to take next; then pull them out of their mouths; put them in the dish; help themselves; and fall to work again. At dinner there is nothing to drink upon the table but great jugs full of cold water. Nobody says anything, at any meal, to anybody. All the passengers are very dismal, and seem to have tremendous secrets weighing on their minds. There is no conversation, no laughter, no cheerfulness, no sociality, except in spitting; and that is done in silent fellowship round the stove, when the meal is over. Every man sits down dull and languid; swallows his fare as if breakfasts, dinners, and suppers were necessities of nature never to be coupled with recreation or enjoyment; and, having bolted his food in a gloomy silence, bolts himself in the same state. But for these animal observances, you might suppose the whole male portion of the company to be the melancholy ghosts of departed bookkeepers, who had fallen dead at the desk: such is their weary air of business and calculation. Undertakers on duty would be sprightly beside them; and a collation of funeral baked meats, in comparison with these meals, would be a sparkling festivity.

The people are all alike, too. There is no diversity of character. They travel about on the same errands, say and do the same things in exactly the same manner, and follow in the same dull, cheerless round. All down the long table there is scarcely a man who is in anything different from his neighbour. It is quite a relief to have, sitting opposite, that little girl of fifteen with the loquacious chin: who, to do her justice, acts up to it, and fully identifies Nature's handwriting; for, of all the small chatterboxes that ever invaded the repose of drowsy ladies' cabin, she is the first and foremost. The beautiful girl who sits a little beyond her—farther down the table there—married the young man with the dark whiskers, who sits beyond *her*, only last month. They are going to settle in the very Far West, where he has lived four years, but where she has never been. They were both overturned in a stage-coach the other day (a bad omen anywhere else, where overturns are not so common), and his head, which bears the marks of a recent wound, is bound up still. She was hurt, too, at the same time, and lay insensible for some days; bright as her eyes are now.

Further down still, sits a man who is going some miles beyond their place of destination to "improve" a newly-discovered copper mine. He carries the village—that is to be—with him: a few frame cottages, and an apparatus for smelting the copper. He carries its people too. They are partly American and partly Irish, and herd together on the lower deck; where they amused themselves last evening till the night was pretty far advanced, by alternately firing off pistols and singing hymns.

They, and the very few who have been left at table twenty minutes, rise and go away. We do so too; and, passing through our little state-room, resume our seats in the quiet gallery without.

A fine broad river always, but in some parts much wider than in others: and then there is usually a green island covered with trees, dividing it into two streams. Occasionally we stop for a few minutes, maybe to take in wood, maybe for passengers, at some small town or village (I ought to say city, every place is a city here); but the banks are for the most part deep solitudes, overgrown with trees, which, hereabouts, are already in leaf and very green. For miles, and miles, and miles, these solitudes are unbroken by any sign of human life or trace of human footstep; nor is anything seen to move about them but the blue jay, whose colour is so bright, and yet so delicate, that it looks like a flying flower. At lengthened intervals a log-cabin, with its little space of cleared land about it, nestles under a rising ground, and sends its thread of blue smoke curling up into the sky. It stands in the corner of the poor field of wheat, which is full of great unsightly stumps, like earthy butchers' blocks. Sometimes the ground is only just now cleared: the felled trees lying yet upon the soil: and the log-house only this morning begun. As we pass this clearing, the settler leans upon his axe or hammer, and looks wistfully at the people from the world. The children creep out of the temporary hut, which is like a gipsy tent upon the ground, and clap their hands and shout. The dog only glances round at us; and then looks up into his master's face again, as if he were rendered uneasy by any suspension of the common business, and had nothing more to do with pleasurers. And still there is the same eternal foreground. The river has washed away its banks, and stately trees have fallen down into the stream. Some have been there so long, that they are mere dry, grizzly skeletons. Some have just toppled over,

and, having earth yet about their roots, are bathing their green heads in the river, and putting forth new shoots and branches. Some are almost sliding down as you look at them. And some were drowned so long ago, that their bleached arms start out from the middle of the current, and seem to try to grasp the boat, and drag it under water.

Through such a scene as this the unwieldy machine takes its hoarse sullen way: venting, at every revolution of the paddles, a loud high-pressure blast; enough, one would think, to waken up the host of Indians who lie buried in a great mound yonder: so old, that mighty oaks and other forest trees have struck their roots into its earth; and so high, that it is a hill even among the hills that Nature planted round it. The very river, as though it shared one's feelings of compassion for the extinct tribes who lived so pleasantly here, in their blessed ignorance of white existence, hundreds of years ago, steals out of its way to ripple near this mound:

EMIGRANTS.

and there are few places where the Ohio sparkles more brightly than in the Big Grave Creek.

All this I see as I sit in the little stern-gallery mentioned just now. Evening slowly steals upon the landscape, and changes it before me, when we stop to set some emigrants ashore.

Five men, as many women, and a little girl. All their worldly goods are a bag, a large chest, and an old chair: one old, high-backed, rush-bottomed chair: a solitary settler in itself. They are rowed ashore in the boat, while the vessel stands a little off awaiting its return, the water being shallow. They are landed at the foot of a high bank, on the summit of which are a few log-cabins, attainable only by a long winding path. It is growing dusk; but the sun is very red, and shines in the water, and on some of the tree-tops, like fire.

The men get out of the boat first; help out the women; take out the bag, the chest, the chair; bid the rowers "good-bye;" and shove the boat off for them. At the first plash of the

oars in the water, the oldest woman of the party sits down in the old chair, close to the water's edge, without speaking a word. None of the others sit down, though the chest is large enough for many seats. They all stand where they landed, as if stricken into stone; and look after the boat. So they remain, quite still and silent: the old woman and her old chair in the centre; the bag and chest upon the shore, without anybody heeding them: all eyes fixed upon the boat. It comes alongside, is made fast, the men jump on board, the engine is put in motion, and we go hoarsely on again. There they stand yet, without the motion of a hand. I can see them, through my glass, when, in the distance and increasing darkness, they are mere specks to the eye: lingering there still: the old woman in the old chair, and all the rest about her: not stirring in the least degree. And thus I slowly lose them.

The night is dark, and we proceed within the shadow of the wooded bank, which makes it darker. After gliding past the sombre maze of boughs for a long time, we come upon an open space where the tall trees are burning. The shape of every branch and twig is expressed in a deep red glow, and as the light wind stirs and ruffles it, they seem to vegetate in fire. It is such a sight as we read of in legends of enchanted forests: saving that it is sad to see these noble works wasting away so awfully, alone; and to think how many years must come and go before the magic that created them will rear their like upon this ground again. But the time will come: and when, in their changed ashes, the growth of centuries unborn has struck its roots, the restless men of distant ages will repair to these again unpeopled solitudes; and their fellows, in cities far away, that slumber now, perhaps, beneath the rolling sea, will read, in language strange to any ears in being now, but very old to them, of primeval forests where the axe was never heard, and where the jungled ground was never trodden by a human foot.

Midnight and sleep blot out these scenes and thoughts: and when the morning shines again, it gilds the housetops of a lively city, before whose broad paved wharf the boat is moored: with other boats, and flags, and moving wheels, and hum of men around it; as though there were not a solitary or silent rood of ground within the compass of a thousand miles.

Cincinnati is a beautiful city; cheerful, thriving, and animated. I have not often seen a place that commends itself so favourably and pleasantly to a stranger at the first glance as this does: with its clean houses of red and white, its well-paved roads, and footways of bright tile. Nor does it become less prepossessing on a closer acquaintance. The streets are broad and airy, the shops extremely good, the private residences remarkable for their elegance and neatness. There is something of invention and fancy in the varying styles of these latter erections, which, after the dull company of the steamboat, is perfectly delightful, as conveying an assurance that there are such qualities still in existence. The disposition to ornament these pretty villas, and render them attractive, leads to the culture of trees and flowers, and the laying out of well-kept gardens, the sight of which, to those who walk along the streets, is inexpressibly refreshing and agreeable. I was quite charmed with the appearance of the town, and its adjoining suburb of Mount Auburn; from which the city, lying in an amphitheatre of hills, forms a picture of remarkable beauty, and is seen to great advantage.

There happened to be a great Temperance Convention held here on the day after our arrival; and as the order of march brought the procession under the windows of the hotel in which we lodged, when they started in the morning, I had a good opportunity of seeing it. It comprised several thousand men; the members of various "Washington Auxiliary Temperance Societies;" and was marshalled by officers on horseback, who cantered briskly up and down the line, with scarfs and ribbons of bright colours fluttering out behind them gaily. There were bands of music, too, and banners out of number: and it was a fresh, holiday-looking concourse altogether.

I was particularly pleased to see the Irishmen, who formed a distinct society among themselves, and mustered very strong with their green scarfs; carrying their national Harp, and their Portrait of Father Mathew, high above the people's heads. They looked as jolly and good-humoured as ever; and working (here) the hardest for their living, and doing any kind of sturdy labour that came in their way, were the most independent fellows there, I thought.

The banners were very well painted, and flaunted down the street famously. There was the smiting of the rock, and the gushing forth of the waters; and there was a temperate man with "considerable of a hatchet" (as the standard-bearer would probably have said), aiming a deadly blow at a serpent which was apparently about to spring upon him from the top of a barrel of spirits. But the chief feature of this part of the show was a huge allegorical device,

borne among the ship carpenters, on one side whereof the steamboat Alcohol was represented bursting her boiler and exploding with a great crash, while upon the other, the good ship Temperance sailed away with a fair wind, to the heart's content of the captain, crew, and passengers.

After going round the town, the procession repaired to a certain appointed place, where, as the printed programme set forth, it would be received by the children of the different free-schools, "singing Temperance Songs." I was prevented from getting there in time to hear these Little Warblers, or to report upon this novel kind of vocal entertainment: novel, at least, to me: but I found, in a large open space, each society gathered round its own banners, and listening in silent attention to its own orator. The speeches, judging from the little I could hear of them, were certainly adapted to the occasion, as having that degree of relationship to cold water which wet blankets may claim: but the main thing was the conduct and appearance of the audience throughout the day, and that was admirable and full of promise.

Cincinnati is honourably famous for its free-schools, of which it has so many that no person's child among its population can, by possibility, want the means of education, which are extended, upon an average, to four thousand pupils annually. I was only present in one of these establishments during the hours of instruction. In the boys' department, which was full of little urchins (varying in their ages, I should say, from six years old to ten or twelve), the master offered to institute an extemporary examination of the pupils in algebra; a proposal which, as I was by no means confident of my ability to detect mistakes in that science, I declined with some alarm. In the girls' school, reading was proposed; and, as I felt tolerably equal to that art, I expressed my willingness to hear a class. Books were distributed accordingly, and some half-dozen girls relieved each other in reading paragraphs from English history. But it seemed to be a dry compilation, infinitely above their powers; and when they had blundered through three or four dreary passages concerning the treaty of Amiens, and other thrilling topics of the same nature (obviously without comprehending ten words), I expressed myself quite satisfied. It is very possible that they only mounted to this exalted stave in the Ladder of Learning for the astonishment of a visitor; and that at other times they keep upon its lower rounds; but I should have been much better pleased and satisfied if I had heard them exercised in simpler lessons which they understood.

As in every other place I visited, the Judges here were gentlemen of high character and attainments. I was in one of the courts for a few minutes, and found it like those to which I have already referred. A nuisance cause was trying; there were not many spectators; and the witnesses, counsel, and jury formed a sort of family circle, sufficiently jocose and snug.

The society with which I mingled was intelligent, courteous, and agreeable. The inhabitants of Cincinnati are proud of their city, as one of the most interesting in America: and with good reason: for beautiful and thriving as it is now, and containing, as it does, a population of fifty thousand souls, but two-and-fifty years have passed away since the ground on which it stands (bought at that time for a few dollars) was a wild wood, and its citizens were but a handful of dwellers in scattered log-huts upon the river's shore.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM CINCINNATI TO LOUISVILLE IN ANOTHER WESTERN STEAMBOAT; AND FROM LOUISVILLE TO ST. LOUIS IN ANOTHER. ST. LOUIS.

LEAVING Cincinnati at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, we embarked for Louisville in the Pike steamboat, which, carrying the mails, was a packet of a much better class than that in which we had come from Pittsburg. As this passage does not occupy more than twelve or thirteen hours, we arranged to go ashore that night: not coveting the distinction of sleeping in a state-room, when it was possible to sleep anywhere else.

There chanced to be on board this boat, in addition to the usual dreary crowd of passengers, one Pitchlynn, a chief of the Choctaw tribe of Indians, who *sent in his card* to me, and with whom I had the pleasure of a long conversation.

He spoke English perfectly well, though he had not begun to learn the language, he told me, until he was a young man grown. He had read many books; and Scott's poetry appeared to have left a strong impression on his mind: especially the opening of The Lady of the Lake, and the great battle scene in Marmion, in which, no doubt from the congeniality of the subjects to his own pursuits and tastes, he had great interest and delight. He appeared to understand correctly all he had read; and whatever fiction had enlisted his sympathy in its belief, had done

so keenly and earnestly. I might almost say fiercely. He was dressed in our ordinary every-day costume, which hung about his fine figure loosely, and with indifferent grace. On my telling him that I regretted not to see him in his own attire, he threw up his right arm for a moment, as though he were brandishing some heavy weapon, and answered, as he let it fall again, that his race were losing many things besides their dress, and would soon be seen upon the earth no more: but he wore it at home, he added proudly.

He told me that he had been away from his home, west of the Mississippi, seventeen months: and was now returning. He had been chiefly at Washington on some negotiations pending between his Tribe and the Government: which were not settled yet (he said in a melancholy way), and he feared never would be: for what could a few poor Indians do against such well-skilled men of business as the whites? He had no love for Washington; tired of towns and cities very soon; and longed for the Forest and the Prairie.

I asked him what he thought of Congress? He answered, with a smile, that it wanted dignity in an Indian's eyes.

He would very much like, he said, to see England before he died; and spoke with much interest about the great things to be seen there. When I told him of that chamber in the British Museum wherein are preserved household memorials of a race that ceased to be, thousands of years ago, he was very attentive, and it was not hard to see that he had a reference in his mind to the gradual fading away of his own people.

This led us to speak of Mr. Catlin's gallery, which he praised highly: observing that his own portrait was among the collection, and that all the likenesses were "elegant." Mr. Cooper, he said, had painted the Red Man well; and so would I, he knew, if I would go home with him and hunt buffaloes, which he was quite anxious I should do. When I told him that, supposing I went, I should not be very likely to damage the buffaloes much, he took it as a great joke and laughed heartily.

He was a remarkably handsome man; some years past forty I should judge; with long black hair, an aquiline nose, broad cheek bones, a sunburnt complexion, and a very bright, keen, dark, and piercing eye. There were but twenty thousand of the Choctaws left, he said, and their number was decreasing every day. A few of his brother chiefs had been obliged to become civilised, and to make themselves acquainted with what the whites knew, for it was their only chance of existence. But they were not many; and the rest were as they always had been. He dwelt on this: and said several times that unless they tried to assimilate themselves to their conquerors, they must be swept away before the strides of civilised society.

When we shook hands at parting, I told him he must come to England, as he longed to see the land so much: that I should hope to see him there one day: and that I could promise him he would be well received and kindly treated. He was evidently pleased by this assurance, though he rejoined, with a good-humoured smile and an arch shake of his head, that the English used to be very fond of the Red Men when they wanted their help, but had not cared much for them since.

He took his leave; as stately and complete a gentleman of Nature's making as ever I beheld; and moved among the people in the boat, another kind of being. He sent me a lithographed portrait of himself soon afterwards; very like, though scarcely handsome enough; which I have carefully preserved in memory of our brief acquaintance.

There was nothing very interesting in the scenery of this day's journey, which brought us at midnight to Louisville. We slept at the Galt House; a splendid hotel; and were as handsomely lodged as though we had been in Paris, rather than hundreds of miles beyond the Alleghanies.

The city presenting no objects of sufficient interest to detain us on our way, we resolved to proceed next day by another steamboat, the Fulton, and to join it, about noon, at a suburb called Portland, where it would be delayed some time in passing through a canal.

The interval, after breakfast, we devoted to riding through the town, which is regular and cheerful: the streets being laid out at right angles, and planted with young trees. The buildings are smoky and blackened, from the use of bituminous coal, but an Englishman is well used to that appearance, and indisposed to quarrel with it. There did not appear to be much business stirring; and some unfinished buildings and improvements seemed to intimate that the city had been over-built in the ardour of "going ahead," and was suffering under the reaction consequent upon such feverish forcing of its powers.

On our way to Portland we passed a "Magistrate's Office," which amused me, as looking far more like a dame school than any police establishment: for this awful Institution was

nothing but a little, lazy, good-for-nothing front parlour, open to the street; wherein two or three figures (I presume the magistrate and his myrmidons) were basking in the sunshine, the very effigies of languor and repose. It was a perfect picture of Justice retired from business for want of customers; her sword and scales sold off; napping comfortably with her legs upon the table.

Here, as elsewhere in these parts, the road was perfectly alive with pigs of all ages; lying about in every direction, fast asleep; or grunting along in quest of hidden dainties. I had always a sneaking kindness for these odd animals, and found a constant source of amusement, when all others failed, in watching their proceedings. As we were riding along this morning, I observed a little incident between two youthful pigs, which was so very human as to be inexpressibly comical and grotesque at the time, though, I dare say, in telling, it is tame enough.

One young gentleman (a very delicate porker with several straws sticking about his nose, betokening recent investigations in a dunghill), was walking deliberately on, profoundly thinking, when suddenly his brother, who was lying in a miry hole unseen by him, rose up immediately before his startled eyes, ghostly with damp mud. Never was pig's whole mass of blood so turned. He started back at least three feet, gazed for a moment, and then shot off as hard as he could go: his excessively little tail vibrating with speed and terror like a distracted pendulum. But, before he had gone very far, he began to reason with himself as to the nature of this frightful appearance; and as he reasoned, he relaxed his speed by gradual degrees; until at last he stopped, and faced about. There was his brother, with the mud upon him glazing in the sun, yet staring out of the very same hole, perfectly amazed at his proceedings! He was no sooner assured of this; and he assured himself so carefully that one may almost say he shaded his eyes with his hand to see the better; than he came back at a round trot, pounced upon him, and summarily took off a piece of his tail; as a caution to him to be careful what he was about for the future, and never to play tricks with his family any more.

We found the steamboat in the canal, waiting for the slow process of getting through the lock, and went on board, where we shortly afterwards had a new kind of visitor in the person of a certain Kentucky Giant, whose name is Porter, and who is of the moderate height of seven feet eight inches in his stockings.

There never was a race of people who so completely gave the lie to history as these giants, or whom all the chroniclers have so cruelly libelled. Instead of roaring and ravaging about the world, constantly catering for their cannibal larders, and perpetually going to market in an unlawful manner, they are the meekest people in any man's acquaintance: rather inclining to milk and vegetable diet, and bearing anything for a quiet life. So decidedly are amiability and mildness their characteristics, that I confess I look upon that youth who distinguished himself by the slaughter of these inoffensive persons as a false-hearted brigand, who, pretending to philanthropic motives, was secretly influenced only by the wealth stored up within their castles, and the hope of plunder. And I lean the more to this opinion from finding that even the historian of those exploits, with all his partiality for his hero, is fain to admit that the slaughtered monsters in question were of a very innocent and simple turn; extremely guileless and ready of belief; lending a credulous ear to the most improbable tales; suffering themselves to be easily entrapped into pits; and even (as in the case of the Welsh Giant), with an excess of the hospitable politeness of a landlord, ripping themselves open, rather than hint at the possibility of their guests being versed in the vagabond arts of sleight-of-hand and hocus-pocus.

The Kentucky Giant was but another illustration of the truth of this position. He had a weakness in the region of the knees, and a trustfulness in his long face, which appealed even to five-feet-nine for encouragement and support. He was only twenty-five years old, he said, and had grown recently, for it had been found necessary to make an addition to the legs of his inexpressibles. At fifteen he was a short boy, and in those days his English father and his Irish mother had rather snubbed him, as being too small of stature to sustain the credit of the family. He added that his health had not been good, though it was better now; but short people are not wanting who whisper that he drinks too hard.

I understand he drives a hackney coach, though how he does it, unless he stands on the foot-board behind, and lies along the roof upon his chest, with his chin in the box, it would be difficult to comprehend. He brought his gun with him, as a curiosity. Christened "The Little Rifle," and displayed outside a shop-window, it would make the fortune of any retail business in Holborn. When he had shown himself and talked a little while, he withdrew with his pocket instrument, and went bobbing down the cabin, among men of six feet high and up-

wards, like a lighthouse walking among lamp-posts.

Within a few minutes afterwards we were out of the canal, and in the Ohio River again.

The arrangements of the boat were like those of the Messenger, and the passengers were of the same order of people. We fed at the same times, on the same kind of viands, in the same dull manner, and with the same observances. The company appeared to be oppressed by the same tremendous concealments, and had as little capacity of enjoyment or light-heartedness. I never in my life did see such listless, heavy dulness as brooded over these meals: the very recollection of it weighs me down, and makes me, for the moment, wretched. Reading and writing on my knee, in our little cabin, I really dreaded the coming of the hour that summoned us to table; and was as glad to escape from it again as if it had been a penance or a punishment. Healthy cheerfulness and good spirits forming a part of the banquet, I could soak my crusts in the fountain with Le Sage's strolling player, and revel in their glad enjoyment: but sitting down with so many fellow-animals to ward off thirst and hunger as a business; to empty each creature his Yahoo's trough as quickly as he can, and then slink sullenly away; to have these social sacraments stripped of everything but the mere greedy satisfaction of the natural cravings; goes so against the grain with me, that I seriously believe the recollection of these funeral feasts will be a waking nightmare to me all my life.

There was some relief in this boat, too, which there had not been in the other, for the captain (a blunt, good-natured fellow) had his handsome wife with him, who was disposed to be lively and agreeable, as were a few other lady passengers who had their seats about us at the same end of the table. But nothing could have made head against the depressing influence of the general body. There was a magnetism of dulness in them which would have beaten down the most facetious companion that the earth ever knew. A jest would have been a crime, and a smile would have faded into a grinning horror. Such deadly leaden people; such systematic, plodding, weary, insupportable heaviness; such a mass of animated indigestion in respect of all that was genial, jovial, frank, social, or hearty; never, sure, was brought together elsewhere since the world began.

Nor was the scenery, as we approached the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, at all inspiriting in its influence. The trees were stunted in their growth; the banks were low and flat; the settlements and log-cabins fewer in number: their inhabitants more wan and wretched than any we had encountered yet. No songs of birds were in the air, no pleasant scents, no moving lights and shadows from swift-passing clouds. Hour after hour, the changeless glare of the hot, unwinking sky shone upon the same monotonous objects. Hour after hour, the river rolled along as wearily and slowly as the time itself.

At length, upon the morning of the third day, we arrived at a spot so much more desolate than any we had yet beheld, that the forlornest places we had passed were, in comparison with it, full of interest. At the junction of the two rivers, on ground so flat and low and marshy, that at certain seasons of the year it is inundated to the housetops, lies a breeding-place of fever, ague, and death; vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope, and speculated in, on the faith of monstrous representations, to many people's ruin. A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away: cleared here and there for the space of a few yards; and teeming, then, with rank, unwholesome vegetation, in whose baleful shade the wretched wanderers who are tempted hither droop, and die, and lay their bones; the hateful Mississippi circling and eddying before it, and turning off upon its southern course, a slimy monster hideous to behold; a hotbed of disease, an ugly sepulchre, a grave uncheered by any gleam of promise: a place without one single quality, in earth or air or water, to commend it: such is this dismal Cairo.

But what words shall describe the Mississippi, great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven!) has no young children like him? An enormous ditch, sometimes two or three miles wide, running liquid mud, six miles an hour: its strong and frothy current choked and obstructed everywhere by huge logs and whole forest trees: now twining themselves together in great rafts, from the interstices of which a sedgy, lazy foam works up, to float upon the water's top: now rolling past like monstrous bodies, their tangled roots showing like matted hair; now glancing singly by like giant leeches; and now writhing round and round in the vortex of some small whirlpool like wounded snakes. The banks low, the trees dwarfish, the marshes swarming with frogs, the wretched cabins few and far apart, their inmates hollow-cheeked and pale, the weather very hot, mosquitoes penetrating into every crack and crevice of the boat, mud and slime on everything: nothing pleasant in its aspect, but the

harmless lightning which flickers every night upon the dark horizon.

For two days we toiled up this foul stream, striking constantly against the floating timber, or stopping to avoid those more dangerous obstacles, the snags, or sawyers, which are the hidden trunks of trees that have their roots below the tide. When the nights are very dark, the look-out stationed in the head of the boat knows, by the ripple of the water, if any great impediment be near at hand, and rings a bell beside him, which is the signal for the engine to be stopped; but always in the night this bell has work to do, and, after every ring, there comes a blow which renders it no easy matter to remain in bed.

The decline of day here was very gorgeous; tinging the firmament deeply with red and gold, up to the very keystone of the arch above us. As the sun went down behind the bank, the slightest blades of grass upon it seemed to become as distinctly visible as the arteries in the skeleton of a leaf, and when, as it slowly sank, the red and golden bars upon the water grew dimmer, and dimmer yet, as if they were sinking too; and all the glowing colours of departing day paled, inch by inch, before the sombre night; the scene became a thousand times more lonesome and more dreary than before, and all its influences darkened with the sky.

We drank the muddy water of this river while we were upon it. It is considered wholesome by the natives, and is something more opaque than gruel. I have seen water like it at the Filter shops, but nowhere else.

On the fourth night after leaving Louisville we reached St. Louis, and here I witnessed the conclusion of an incident, trifling enough in itself, but very pleasant to see, which had interested me during the whole journey.

There was a little woman on board, with a little baby; and both little woman and little child were cheerful, good-looking, bright-eyed, and fair to see. The little woman had been passing a long time with her sick mother in New York, and had left her home in St. Louis in that condition in which ladies who truly love their lords desire to be. The baby was born in her mother's house; and she had not seen her husband (to whom she was now returning) for twelve months: having left him a month or two after their marriage.

Well, to be sure there never was a little woman so full of hope, and tenderness, and love, and anxiety as this little woman was: and all day long she wondered whether "He" would be at the wharf; and whether "He" had got her letter; and whether, if she sent the baby ashore by somebody else, "He" would know it, meeting it in the street: which, seeing that he had never set eyes upon it in his life, was not very likely in the abstract, but was probable enough to the young mother. She was such an artless little creature; and was in such a sunny, beaming, hopeful state; and let out all this matter, clinging close about her heart, so freely; that all the other lady passengers entered into the spirit of it as much as she; and the captain (who heard all about it from his wife) was wondrous sly, I promise you: inquiring, every time we met at table, as in forgetfulness, whether she expected anybody to meet her at St. Louis, and whether she would want to go ashore the night we reached it (but he supposed she wouldn't), and cutting many other dry jokes of that nature. There was one little, weazen, dried-apple-faced old woman, who took occasion to doubt the constancy of husbands in such circumstances of bereavement; and there was another lady (with a lapdog) old enough to moralise on the lightness of human affections, and yet not so old that she could help nursing the baby now and then, or laughing with the rest when the little woman called it by its father's name, and asked it all manner of fantastic questions concerning him in the joy of her heart.

It was something of a blow to the little woman, that when we were within twenty miles of our destination, it became clearly necessary to put this baby to bed. But she got over it with the same good-humour; tied a handkerchief round her head; and came out into the little gallery with the rest. Then, such an oracle as she became in reference to the localities! and such facetiousness as was displayed by the married ladies! and such sympathy as was shown by the single ones! and such peals of laughter as the little woman herself (who would just as soon have cried) greeted every jest with!

At last there were the lights of St. Louis, and here was the wharf, and those were the steps: and the little woman, covering her face with her hands, and laughing (or seeming to laugh) more than ever, ran into her own cabin, and shut herself up. I have no doubt that, in the charming inconsistency of such excitement, she stopped her ears, lest she should hear "Him" asking for her: but I did not see her do it.

Then, a great crowd of people rushed on board, though the boat was not yet made fast, but was wandering about, among the other boats, to find a landing-place: and everybody looked for the husband: and nobody saw him: when, in the midst of us all—Heaven knows how she ever got

there—there was the little woman clinging with both arms tight round the neck of a fine, good-looking, sturdy young fellow! and, in a moment afterwards, there she was again, actually clapping her little hands for joy, as she dragged him through the small door of her small cabin, to look at the baby as he lay asleep!

We went to a large hotel, called the Planter's House: built like an English hospital, with long passages and bare walls, and sky-lights above the room-doors for the free circulation of air. There were a great many boarders in it; and as many lights sparkled and glistened from the windows down into the street below, when we drove up, as if it had been illuminated on some occasion of rejoicing. It is an excellent house, and the proprietors have most bountiful notions of providing the creature comforts. Dining alone with my wife in our own room one day, I counted fourteen dishes on the table at once.

In the old French portion of the town the thoroughfares are narrow and crooked, and some of the houses are very quaint and picturesque: being built of wood, with tumble-down galleries before the windows, approachable by stairs, or rather ladders, from the street. There are queer little barbers' shops, and drinking-houses too, in this quarter; and abundance of crazy old tenements with blinking casements, such as may be seen in Flanders. Some of these ancient habitations, with high garret gable windows perking into the roofs, have a kind of French shrug about them; and, being lop-sided with age, appear to hold their heads askew besides, as if they were grimacing in astonishment at the American Improvements.

It is hardly necessary to say that these consist of wharfs and warehouses, and new buildings in all directions; and of a great many vast plans which are still "progressing." Already, however, some very good houses, broad streets, and marble-fronted shops have gone so far ahead as to be in a state of completion; and the town bids fair, in a few years, to improve considerably: though it is not likely ever to vie, in point of elegance or beauty, with Cincinnati.

The Roman Catholic religion, introduced here by the early French settlers, prevails extensively. Among the public institutions are a Jesuit College; a convent for "the Ladies of the Sacred Heart;" and a large chapel attached to the college, which was in course of erection at the time of my visit, and was intended to be consecrated on the second of December in the next year. The architect of this building is one of the reverend fathers of the school, and the works proceed under his sole direction. The organ will be sent from Belgium.

In addition to these establishments, there is a Roman Catholic cathedral, dedicated to St. Francis Xavier; and a hospital, founded by the munificence of a deceased resident, who was a member of that church. It also sends missionaries from hence among the Indian tribes.

The Unitarian church is represented, in this remote place, as in most other parts of America, by a gentleman of great worth and excellence. The poor have good reason to remember and bless it; for it befriends them, and aids the cause of rational education, without any sectarian or selfish views. It is liberal in all its actions; of kind construction; and of wide benevolence.

There are three free-schools already erected and in full operation in this city. A fourth is building, and will soon be opened.

No man ever admits the unhealthiness of the place he dwells in (unless he is going away from it), and I shall therefore, I have no doubt, be at issue with the inhabitants of St. Louis in questioning the perfect salubrity of its climate, and in hinting that I think it must rather dispose to fever in the summer and autumnal seasons. Just adding, that it is very hot, lies among great rivers, and has vast tracts of undrained swampy land around it, I leave the reader to form his own opinion.

As I had a great desire to see a Prairie before turning back from the furthest point of my wanderings; and as some gentlemen of the town had, in their hospitable consideration, an equal desire to gratify me; a day was fixed, before my departure, for an expedition to the Looking-Glass Prairie, which is within thirty miles of the town. Deeming it possible that my readers may not object to know what kind of thing such a gipsy party may be at that distance from home, and among what sort of objects it moves, I will describe the jaunt in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A JAUNT TO THE LOOKING-GLASS PRAIRIE AND BACK.

I MAY premise that the word Prairie is variously pronounced *paraaer*, *parearer*, and *paroarer*. The latter mode of pronunciation is, perhaps, the most in favour.

We were fourteen in all, and all young men: indeed, it is a singular though very natural feature in the society of these distant settlements, that it is mainly

composed of adventurous persons in the prime of life, and has very few grey heads among it. There were no ladies: the trip being a fatiguing one: and we were to start at five o'clock in the morning punctually.

I was called at four, that I might be certain of keeping nobody waiting; and having got some bread-and-milk for breakfast, threw up the window and looked down into the street, expecting to see the whole party busily astir, and great preparations going on below. But, as everything was very quiet, and the street presented that hopeless aspect with which five o'clock in the morning is familiar elsewhere, I deemed it as well to go to bed again, and went accordingly.

I awoke again at seven o'clock, and by that time the party had assembled, and were gathered round, one light carriage, with a very stout axletree; one something on wheels like an amateur carrier's cart; one double phaeton of great antiquity and unearthly construction; one gig with a great hole in its back, and a broken head; and one rider on horseback, who was to go on before. I got into the first coach with three companions; the rest bestowed themselves in the other vehicles; two large baskets were made fast to the lightest; two large stone jars in wicker cases, technically known as demi-johns, were consigned to the "least rowdy" of the party for safe keeping; and the procession moved off to the ferry-boat, in which it was to cross the river bodily, men, horses, carriages, and all, as the manner in these parts is.

We got over the river in due course, and mustered again before a little wooden box on wheels, hove down all aslant in a morass, with "MERCHANT TAILOR" painted in very large letters over the door. Having settled the order of proceeding and the road to be taken, we started off once more, and began to make our way through an ill-favoured Black Hollow, called, less expressively, the American Bottom.

The previous day had been—not to say hot, for the term is weak and lukewarm in its power of conveying an idea of the temperature. The town had been on fire; in a blaze. But at night it had come on to rain in torrents, and all night long it had rained without cessation. We had a pair of very strong horses, but travelled at the rate of little more than a couple of miles an hour, through one unbroken slough of black mud and water. It had no variety but in depth. Now it was only half over the wheels, now it hid the axletree, and now the coach sank down in it almost to the windows. The air resounded in all directions with the loud chirping of the frogs, who, with the pigs (a coarse, ugly breed, as unwholesome-looking as though they were the spontaneous growth of the country), had the whole scene to themselves. Here and there we passed a log-hut; but the wretched cabins were wide apart and thinly scattered, for though the soil is very rich in this place, few people can exist in such a deadly atmosphere. On either side of the track, if it deserve the name, was the thick "bush;" and everywhere was stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water.

As it is the custom in these parts to give a horse a gallon or so of cold water whenever he is in a foam with heat, we halted for that purpose at a log-inn in the wood, far removed from any other residence. It consisted of one room, bare-roofed and bare-walled of course, with a loft above. The ministering priest was a swarthy young savage, in a shirt of cotton print like bed-furniture, and a pair of ragged trousers. There were a couple of young boys, too, nearly naked, lying idly by the well; and they, and he, and *the* traveller at the inn, turned out to look at us.

The traveller was an old man, with a grey, grisly beard two inches long, a shaggy moustache of the same hue, and enormous eyebrows; which almost obscured his lazy, semi-drunken glance, as he stood regarding us with folded arms: poising himself alternately upon his toes and heels. On being addressed by one of the party, he drew nearer, and said, rubbing his chin (which scraped under his horny hand like fresh gravel beneath a nailed shoe), that he was from Delaware, and had lately bought a farm "down there," pointing into one of the marshes where the stunted trees were thickest. He was "going," he added, to St. Louis, to fetch his family, whom he had left behind; but he seemed in no great hurry to bring on these encumbrances, for when we moved away, he loitered back into the cabin, and was plainly bent on stopping there so long as his money lasted. He was a great politician, of course, and explained his opinions at some length to one of our company; but I only remember that he concluded with two sentiments, one of which was, Somebody for ever; and the other, Blast everybody else! which is by no means a bad abstract of the general creed in these matters.

When the horses were swollen out to about twice their natural dimensions (there seems to be an idea here that this kind of inflation improves their going), we went forward again, through mud and mire, and damp, and festering heat, and brake and bush, attended always by the music of the frogs and pigs, until nearly noon, when we halted at a place called Belleville.

Belleville was a small collection of wooden houses, huddled together in the very heart of the bush and swamp. Many of them had singularly bright doors of red and yellow; for the place had been lately visited by a travelling painter, "who got along," as I was told, "by eating his way." The Criminal Court was sitting, and was at that moment trying some criminals for horse-stealing: with whom it would most likely go hard: for live-stock of all kinds, being necessarily very much exposed in the woods, is held by the community in rather higher value than human life; and, for this reason, juries generally make a point of finding all men indicted for cattle-stealing guilty, whether or no.

The horses belonging to the bar, the judge, and witnesses were tied to temporary racks set up roughly in the road; by which is to be understood a forest path, nearly knee deep in mud and slime.

There was an hotel in this place, which, like all hotels in America, had its large dining-room for the public table. It was an odd, shambling, low-roofed outhouse, half cow-shed and half kitchen, with a coarse brown canvas table-cloth, and tin sconces stuck against the walls, to hold candles at supper-time. The horseman had gone forward to have coffee and some eatables prepared, and they were by this time nearly ready. He had ordered "wheat bread and chicken fixings," in preference to "corn bread and common doings." The latter kind of refection includes only pork and bacon. The former comprehends broiled ham, sausages, veal cutlets, steaks, and such other viands of that nature as may be supposed, by a tolerably wide poetical construction, "to fix" a chicken comfortably in the digestive organs of any lady or gentleman.

On one of the door-posts at this inn was a tin plate, whereon was inscribed, in characters of gold, "Doctor Crocus;" and on a sheet of paper, pasted up by the side of this plate, was a written announcement that Doctor Crocus would that evening deliver a lecture on Phrenology for the benefit of the Belleville public: at a charge for admission of so much a head.

Straying up-stairs during the preparation of the chicken fixings, I happened to pass the Doctor's chamber; and as the door stood wide open, and the room was empty, I made bold to peep in.

It was a bare, unfurnished, comfortless room, with an unframed portrait hanging up at the head of the bed; a likeness, I take it, of the Doctor, for the forehead was fully displayed, and great stress was laid by the artist upon its phrenologica developments. The bed itself was covered with an old patchwork counterpane. The room was destitute of carpet or of curtain. There was a damp fire-place without any stove, full of wood ashes; a chair, and a very small table; and on the last-named piece of furniture was displayed, in grand array, the Doctor's library, consisting of some half-dozen greasy old books.

Now, it certainly looked about the last apartment on the whole earth out of which any man would be likely to get anything to do him good. But the door, as I have said, stood coaxingly open, and plainly said, in conjunction with the chair, the portrait, the table, and the books, "Walk in, gentlemen, walk in! Don't be ill, gentlemen, when you may be well in no time. Doctor Crocus is here, gentlemen, the celebrated Doctor Crocus! Doctor Crocus has come all this way to cure you, gentlemen. If you haven't heard of Doctor Crocus, it's your fault, gentlemen, who live a little way out of the world here: not Doctor Crocus's. Walk in, gentlemen, walk in!"

In the passage below, when I went down-stairs again, was Doctor Crocus himself. A crowd had flocked in from the Court House, and a voice from among them called out to the landlord, "Colonel! introduce Doctor Crocus."

"Mr. Dickens," says the Colonel, "Doctor Crocus."

Upon which Doctor Crocus, who is a tall, fine-looking Scotchman, but rather fierce and warlike in appearance for a professor of the peaceful art of healing, bursts out of the concourse with his right arm extended, and his chest thrown out as far as it will possibly come, and says:

"Your countryman, sir!"

Whereupon Doctor Crocus and I shake hands; and Doctor Crocus looks as if I didn't by any means realise his expectations, which, in a linen blouse, and a great straw hat with a green ribbon, and no gloves, and my face and nose profusely ornamented with the stings of mosquitoes and the bites of bugs, it is very likely I did not.

"Long in these parts, sir?" says I.

"Three or four months, sir," says the Doctor.

"Do you think of soon returning to the old country, sir?" says I.

Doctor Crocus makes no verbal answer, but gives me an imploring look, which says so plainly, "Will you ask me that again a little louder, if you please?" that I repeat the question.

"Think of soon returning to the old country, sir?" repeats the Doctor.

"To the old country, sir," I rejoin.

Doctor Crocus looks round upon the crowd to observe the effect he produces, rubs his hands, and says, in a very loud voice:

"Not yet awhile, sir, not yet. You won't catch me at that just yet, sir. I am a little too fond of freedom for *that*, sir. Ha, ha! It's not so easy for a man to tear himself from a free country such as this is, sir. Ha, ha! No, no! Ha, ha! None of that till one's obliged to do it, sir. No, no!"

As Doctor Crocus says these latter words, he shakes his head knowingly, and laughs again. Many of the bystanders shake their heads in concert with the doctor, and laugh too, and look at each other as much as to say, "A pretty bright and first-rate sort of chap is Crocus!" and, unless I am very much mistaken, a good many people went to the lecture that night who never thought about phrenology, or about Doctor Crocus either, in all their lives before.

From Belleville we went on, through the same desolate kind of waste, and constantly attended, without the interval of a moment, by the same music; until, at three o'clock in the afternoon, we halted once more at a village called Lebanon to inflate the horses again, and give them some corn besides: of which they stood much in need. Pending this ceremony, I walked into the village, where I met a full-sized dwelling-house coming downhill at a round trot, drawn by a score or more of oxen.

The public-house was so very clean and good a one, that the managers of the jaunt resolved to return to it, and put up there for the night, if possible. This course decided on, and the horses being well refreshed, we again pushed forward, and came upon the Prairie at sunset.

It would be difficult to say why or how—though it was possibly from having heard and read so much about it—but the effect on me was disappointment. Looking towards the setting sun, there lay, stretched out before my view, a vast expanse of level ground; unbroken, save by one thin line of trees, which scarcely amounted to a scratch upon the great blank; until it met the glowing sky, wherein it seemed to dip: mingling with its rich colours, and mellowing in its distant blue. There it lay, a tranquil sea or lake without water, if such a simile be admissible, with the day going down upon it: a few birds wheeling here and there: and solitude and silence reigning paramount around. But the grass was not yet high; there were bare black patches on the ground; and the few wild flowers that the eye could see were poor and scanty. Great as the picture was, its very flatness and extent, which left nothing to the imagination, tamed it down and cramped its interest. I felt little of that sense of freedom and exhilaration which a Scottish heath inspires, or even our English downs awaken. It was lonely and wild, but oppressive in its barren monotony. I felt that, in traversing the Prairies, I could never abandon myself to the scene, forgetful of all else; as I should do instinctively, were the heather underneath my feet, or an iron-bound coast beyond; but should often glance towards the distant and frequently receding line of the horizon, and wish it gained and passed. It is not a scene to be forgotten, but it is scarcely one, I think (at all events, as I saw it), to remember with much pleasure, or to covet the looking on again in after life.

We encamped near a solitary log-house, for the sake of its water, and dined upon the plain. The baskets contained roast fowls, buffalo's tongue (an exquisite dainty, by the way), ham, bread, cheese, and butter; biscuits, champagne, sherry; lemon and sugar for punch; and abundance of rough ice. The meal was delicious, and the entertainers were the soul of kindness and good-humour. I have often recalled that cheerful party to my pleasant recollection since, and shall not easily forget, in junketings nearer home with friends of older date, my boon companions on the Prairie.

Returning to Lebanon that night, we lay at the little inn at which we had halted in the afternoon. In point of cleanliness and comfort it would have suffered by no comparison with any village alehouse of a homely kind in England.

Rising at five o'clock next morning, I took a walk about the village: none of the houses were strolling about to-day, but it was early for them yet, perhaps: and then amused myself by lounging in a kind of farmyard behind the tavern, of which the leading features were, a strange jumble of rough sheds for stables; a rude colonnade, built as a cool place of summer resort; a deep well; a great earthen mound for keeping vegetables in, in winter-time; and a pigeon-house, whose little apertures looked, as they do in all pigeon-houses, very much too small for the admission of the plump and swelling-breasted birds who were strutting about it, though they tried to get in never so hard. That interest exhausted, I took a survey of the inn's two parlours, which were decorated with coloured prints of Washington and President Madison, and of a white-faced young lady (much speckled by the flies), who held up her gold neck-chain

for the admiration of the spectator, and informed all admiring comers that she was "Just Seventeen:" although I should have thought her older. In the best room were two oil portraits of the kit-cat size, representing the landlord and his infant son; both looking as bold as lions, and staring out of the canvas with an intensity that would have been cheap at any price. They were painted, I think, by the artist who had touched up the Belleville doors with red and gold; for I seemed to recognise his style immediately.

After breakfast we started to return by a different way from that which we had taken yesterday, and coming up at ten o'clock with an encampment of German emigrants carrying their goods in carts, who had made a rousing fire which they were just quitting, stopped there to refresh. And very pleasant the fire was; for, hot though it had been yesterday, it was quite

"NOT YET AWHILE, SIR, NOT YET."

cold to-day, and the wind blew keenly. Looming in the distance, as we rode along, was another of the ancient Indian burial-places, called the Monks' Mound; in memory of a body of fanatics of the order of La Trappe, who founded a desolate convent there many years ago, when there were no settlers within a thousand miles, and were all swept off by the pernicious climate: in which lamentable fatality few rational people will suppose, perhaps, that society experienced any very severe deprivation.

The track of to-day had the same features as the track of yesterday. There was the swamp, the bush, the perpetual chorus of frogs, the rank unseemly growth, the unwholesome steaming earth. Here and there, and frequently too, we encountered a solitary broken-down waggon, full of some new settler's goods. It was a pitiful sight to see one of these vehicles deep in the mire; the axletree broken; the wheel lying idly by its side; the man gone miles away, to look for assistance; the woman seated among their wandering household gods, with a baby at her breast, a picture of forlorn, dejected patience;

the team of oxen crouching down mournfully in the mud, and breathing forth such clouds of vapour from their mouths and nostrils, that all the damp mist and fog around seemed to have come direct from them.

In due time we mustered once again before the merchant tailor's, and having done so, crossed over to the city in the ferry-boat: passing, on the way, a spot called Bloody Island, the duelling-ground of St. Louis, and so designated in honour of the last fatal combat fought there, which was with pistols, breast to breast. Both combatants fell dead upon the ground; and possibly some rational people may think of them, as of the gloomy madmen on the Monks' Mound, that they were no great loss to the community.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETURN TO CINCINNATI. A STAGE-COACH RIDE FROM THAT CITY TO COLUMBUS, AND THENCE TO SANDUSKY. SO, BY LAKE ERIE, TO THE FALLS OF NIAGARA.

AS I had a desire to travel through the interior of the State of Ohio, and to "strike the lakes," as the phrase is, at a small town called Sandusky, to which that route would conduct us on our way to Niagara, we had to return from St. Louis by the way we had come, and to retrace our former track as far as Cincinnati.

The day on which we were to take leave of St. Louis being very fine; and the steamboat, which was to have started I don't know how early in the morning, postponing, for the third or fourth time, her departure until the afternoon; we rode forward to an old French village on the river, called properly Carondelet, and nicknamed Vide Poche, and arranged that the packet should call for us there.

The place consisted of a few poor cottages and two or three public-houses; the state of whose larders certainly seemed to justify the second designation of the village, for there was nothing to eat in any of them. At length, however, by going back some half a mile or so, we found a solitary house where ham and coffee were procurable; and there we tarried to await the advent of the boat, which would come in sight from the green before the door, a long way off.

It was a neat, unpretending village tavern, and we took our repast in a quaint little room with a bed in it, decorated with some old oil-paintings, which in their time had probably done duty in a Catholic chapel or monastery. The fare was very good, and served with great cleanliness. The house was kept by a characteristic old couple, with whom we had a long talk, and who were perhaps a very good sample of that kind of people in the West.

The landlord was a dry, tough, hard-faced old fellow (not so very old either, for he was but just turned sixty, I should think), who had been out with the militia in the last war with England, and had seen all kinds of service—except a battle; and he had been very near seeing that, he added: very near. He had all his life been restless and locomotive, with an irresistible desire for change; and was still the son of his old self: for, if he had nothing to keep him at home, he said (slightly jerking his hat and his thumb towards the window of the room in which the old lady sat, as we stood talking in front of the house) he would clean up his musket, and be off to Texas to-morrow morning. He was one of the very many descendants of Cain proper to this continent, who seem destined from their birth to serve as pioneers in the great human army: who gladly go on from year to year extending its outposts, and leaving home after home behind them; and die at last, utterly regardless of their graves being left thousands of miles behind, by the wandering generation who succeed.

His wife was a domesticated, kind-hearted old soul, who had come with him "from the queen city of the world," which, it seemed, was Philadelphia; but had no love for this Western country, and, indeed, had little reason to bear it any; having seen her children, one by one, die here of fever, in the full prime and beauty of their youth. Her heart was sore, she said, to think of them; and to talk on this theme, even to strangers, in that blighted place, so far from her old home, eased it somewhat, and became a melancholy pleasure.

The boat appearing towards evening, we bade adieu to the poor old lady and her vagrant spouse, and making for the nearest landing-place, were soon on board the Messenger again, in our old cabin, and steaming down the Mississippi.

If the coming up this river, slowly making head against the stream, be an irksome journey, the shooting down it with the turbid current is almost worse; for then the boat, proceeding at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles an hour, has to force its passage through a labyrinth of floating logs, which, in the dark, it is often impossible to see beforehand or avoid. All that night the

bell was never silent for five minutes at a time; and after every ring the vessel reeled again, sometimes beneath a single blow, sometimes beneath a dozen dealt in quick succession, the lightest of which seemed more than enough to beat in her frail keel, as though it had been pie-crust. Looking down upon the filthy river after dark, it seemed to be alive with monsters, as these black masses rolled upon the surface, or came starting up again, head first, when the boat, in ploughing her way among a shoal of such obstructions, drove a few among them, for the moment, under water. Sometimes the engines stopped during a long interval, and then before her and behind, and gathering close about her on all sides, were so many of these ill-favoured obstacles that she was fairly hemmed in; the centre of a floating island; and was constrained to pause until they parted somewhere, as dark clouds will do before the wind, and opened by degrees a channel out.

In good time next morning, however, we came again in sight of the detestable morass called Cairo: and stopping there to take in wood, lay alongside a barge, whose starting timbers scarcely held together. It was moored to the bank, and on its side was painted "Coffee House;" that being, I suppose, the floating paradise to which the people fly for shelter when they lose their houses for a month or two beneath the hideous waters of the Mississippi. But, looking southward from this point, we had the satisfaction of seeing that intolerable river dragging its slimy length and ugly freight abruptly off towards New Orleans; and, passing a yellow line which stretched across the current, were again upon the clear Ohio, never, I trust, to see the Mississippi more, saving in troubled dreams and nightmares. Leaving it for the company of its sparkling neighbour was like the transition from pain to ease, or the awakening from a horrible vision to cheerful realities.

We arrived at Louisville on the fourth night, and gladly availed ourselves of its excellent hotel. Next day we went on in the Ben Franklin, a beautiful mail steamboat, and reached Cincinnati shortly after midnight. Being by this time nearly tired of sleeping upon shelves, we had remained awake to go ashore straightway; and groping a passage across the dark decks of other boats, and among labyrinths of engine machinery and leaking casks of molasses, we reached the streets, knocked up the porter at the hotel where we had stayed before, and were, to our great joy, safely housed soon afterwards.

We rested but one day at Cincinnati, and then resumed our journey to Sandusky. As it comprised two varieties of stage-coach travelling, which, with those I have already glanced at, comprehend the main characteristics of this mode of transit in America, I will take the reader as our fellow-passenger, and pledge myself to perform the distance with all possible dispatch.

Our place of destination, in the first instance, is Columbus. It is distant about a hundred and twenty miles from Cincinnati, but there is a macadamised road (rare blessing!) the whole way, and the rate of travelling upon it is six miles an hour.

We start at eight o'clock in the morning, in a great mail-coach, whose huge cheeks are so very ruddy and plethoric, that it appears to be troubled with a tendency of blood to the head. Dropsical it certainly is, for it will hold a dozen passengers inside. But, wonderful to add, it is very clean and bright, being nearly new; and rattles through the streets of Cincinnati gaily.

Our way lies through a beautiful country, richly cultivated, and luxuriant in its promise of an abundant harvest. Sometimes we pass a field where the strong bristling stalks of Indian corn look like a crop of walking-sticks, and sometimes an enclosure where the green wheat is springing up among a labyrinth of stumps; the primitive worm-fence is universal, and an ugly thing it is; but the farms are neatly kept, and, save for these differences, one might be travelling just now in Kent.

We often stop to water at a roadside inn, which is always dull and silent. The coachman dismounts and fills his bucket, and holds it to the horses' heads. There is scarcely ever any one to help him; there are seldom any loungers standing round; and never any stable company with jokes to crack. Sometimes, when we have changed our team, there is a difficulty in starting again, arising out of the prevalent mode of breaking a young horse: which is to catch him, harness him against his will, and put him in a stage-coach without further notice: but we get on somehow or other, after a great many kicks and a violent struggle; and jog on as before again.

Occasionally, when we stop to change, some two or three half-drunken loafers will come loitering out with their hands in their pockets, or will be seen kicking their heels in rocking-chairs, or lounging on the window-sill, or sitting on a rail within the colonnade: they have not often anything to say, though, either to us or to each other, but sit there idly staring at the coach and horses. The landlord of the inn is usually

among them, and seems, of all the party, to be the least connected with the business of the house. Indeed, he is, with reference to the tavern, what the driver is in relation to the coach and passengers: whatever happens in his sphere of action, he is quite indifferent, and perfectly easy in his mind.

The frequent change of coachmen works no change or variety in the coachman's character. He is always dirty, sullen, and taciturn. If he be capable of smartness of any kind, moral or physical, he has a faculty of concealing it which is truly marvellous. He never speaks to you as you sit beside him on the box, and if you speak to him, he answers (if at all) in monosyllables. He points out nothing on the road, and seldom looks at anything: being, to all appearance, thoroughly weary of it, and of existence generally. As to doing the honours of his coach, his business, as I have said, is with the horses. The coach follows because it is attached to them and goes on wheels: not because you are in it. Sometimes, towards the end of a long stage, he suddenly breaks out into a discordant fragment of an election song, but his face never sings along with him: it is only his voice, and not often that.

He always chews and always spits, and never encumbers himself with a pocket-handkerchief. The consequences to the box passenger, especially when the wind blows towards him, are not agreeable.

Whenever the coach stops, and you can hear the voices of the inside passengers; or whenever any bystander addresses them, or any one among them; or they address each other; you will hear one phrase repeated over and over and over again to the most extraordinary extent. It is an ordinary and unpromising phrase enough, being neither more nor less than "Yes, sir;" but it is adapted to every variety of circumstance, and fills up every pause in the conversation. Thus:

The time is one o'clock at noon. The scene, a place where we are to stay to dine on this journey. The coach drives up to the door of an inn. The day is warm, and there are several idlers lingering about the tavern, and waiting for the public dinner. Among them is a stout gentleman in a brown hat, swinging himself to and fro in a rocking-chair on the pavement.

As the coach stops, a gentleman in a straw hat looks out of the window.

STRAW HAT (to the stout gentleman in the rocking-chair). I reckon that's Judge Jefferson, ain't it?

BROWN HAT (still swinging; speaking very slowly; and without any emotion whatever). Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. Warm weather, Judge.

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. There was a snap of cold last week.

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. Yes, sir.

A pause, they look at each other very seriously.

STRAW HAT. I calculate you'll have got through that case of the corporation, Judge, by this time, now?

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. How did the verdict go, sir?

BROWN HAT. For the defendant, sir.

STRAW HAT (interrogatively). Yes, sir?

BROWN HAT (affirmatively). Yes, sir.

BOTH (musingly, as each gazes down the street). Yes, sir.

Another pause. They look at each other again, still more seriously than before.

BROWN HAT. This coach is rather behind its time to-day, I guess.

STRAW HAT (doubtingly). Yes, sir.

BROWN HAT (looking at his watch). Yes, sir; nigh upon two hours.

STRAW HAT (raising his eyebrows in very great surprise). Yes, sir!

BROWN HAT (decisively, as he puts up his watch). Yes, sir.

ALL THE OTHER INSIDE PASSENGERS (among themselves). Yes, sir.

COACHMAN (in a very surly tone). No, it an't.

STRAW HAT (to the coachman). Well, I don't know, sir. We were a pretty tall time coming that last fifteen mile. That's a fact.

The coachman making no reply, and plainly declining to enter into any controversy on a subject so far removed from his sympathies and feelings, another passenger says, "Yes, sir;" and the gentleman in the straw hat, in acknowledgment of his courtesy, says, "Yes, sir," to him in return. The straw hat then inquires of the brown hat whether that coach in which he (the straw hat) then sits is not a new one? To which the brown hat again makes answer, "Yes, sir."

STRAW HAT. I thought so. Pretty loud smell of varnish, sir?

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

ALL THE OTHER INSIDE PASSENGERS. Yes, sir.

BROWN HAT (to the company in general). Yes, sir.

The conversational powers of the company

having been by this time pretty heavily taxed, the straw hat opens the door and gets out; and all the rest alight also. We dine soon afterwards with the boarders in the house, and have nothing to drink but tea and coffee. As they are both very bad, and the water is worse, I ask for brandy; but it is a Temperance Hotel, and spirits are not to be had for love or money. This preposterous forcing of unpleasant drinks down the reluctant throats of travellers is not at all uncommon in America, but I never discovered that the scruples of such wincing landlords induced them to preserve any unusually nice balance between the quality of their fare and their scale of charges: on the contrary, I rather suspected them of diminishing the one and exalting the other, by way of recompense for the loss of their profit on the sale of spirituous liquors. After all, perhaps, the plainest course for persons of such tender consciences would be, a total abstinence from tavern-keeping.

Dinner over, we get into another vehicle which is ready at the door (for the coach has been changed in the interval), and resume our journey; which continues through the same kind of country until evening, when we come to the town where we are to stop for tea and supper; and having delivered the mail-bags at the Post Office, ride through the usual wide street, lined with the usual stores and houses (the drapers always having hung up at their door, by way of sign, a piece of bright red cloth), to the hotel where this meal is prepared. There being many boarders here, we sit down a large party, and a very melancholy one as usual. But there is a buxom hostess at the head of the table, and opposite, a simple Welsh schoolmaster with his wife and child; who came here, on a speculation of greater promise than performance, to teach the classics: and they are sufficient subjects of interest until the meal is over, and another coach is ready. In it we go on once more, lighted by a bright moon, until midnight; when we stop to change the coach again, and remain for half an hour or so in a miserable room, with a blurred lithograph of Washington over the smoky fire-place, and a mighty jug of cold water on the table: to which refreshment the moody passengers do so apply themselves that they would seem to be, one and all, keen patients of Doctor Sangrado. Among them is a very little boy, who chews tobacco like a very big one; and a droning gentleman, who talks arithmetically and statistically on all subjects, from poetry downwards; and who always speaks in the same key, with exactly the same emphasis, and with very grave deliberation. He came outside just now, and told me how that the uncle of a certain young lady who had been spirited away and married by a certain captain lived in these parts; and how this uncle was so valiant and ferocious that he shouldn't wonder if he were to follow the said captain to England, "and shoot him down in the street, wherever he found him;" in the feasibility of which strong measure I, being for the moment rather prone to contradiction, from feeling half asleep and very tired, declined to acquiesce: assuring him that if the uncle did resort to it, or gratified any other little whim of the like nature, he would find himself one morning prematurely throttled at the Old Bailey; and that he would do well to make his will before he went, as he would certainly want it before he had been in Britain very long.

On we go all night, and by-and-by the day begins to break, and presently the first cheerful rays of the warm sun come slanting on us brightly. It sheds its light upon a miserable waste of sodden grass, and dull trees, and squalid huts, whose aspect is forlorn and grievous in the last degree. A very desert in the wood, whose growth of green is dank and noxious like that upon the top of standing water: where poisonous fungus grows in the rare footprint on the oozy ground, and sprouts like witches' coral from the crevices in the cabin wall and floor; it is a hideous thing to lie upon the very threshold of a city. But it was purchased years ago, and as the owner cannot be discovered, the State has been unable to reclaim it. So there it remains, in the midst of cultivation and improvement, like ground accursed, and made obscene and rank by some great crime.

We reached Columbus shortly before seven o'clock, and stayed there, to refresh, that day and night: having excellent apartments in a very large unfinished hotel called the Neill House, which were richly fitted with the polished wood of the black walnut, and opened on a handsome portico and stone verandah, like rooms in some Italian mansion. The town is clean and pretty, and of course is "going to be" much larger. It is the seat of the State legislature of Ohio, and lays claim, in consequence, to some consideration and importance.

There being no stage-coach next day upon the road we wished to take, I hired "an extra," at a reasonable charge, to carry us to Tiffin; a small town from whence there is a railroad to Sandusky. This extra was an ordinary four-horse stage-coach, such as I have described, changing horses and drivers, as the stage-coach

would, but was exclusively our own for the journey. To insure our having horses at the proper stations, and being incommoded by no strangers, the proprietors sent an agent on the box, who was to accompany us the whole way through; and thus attended, and bearing with us, besides, a hamper full of savoury cold meats, and fruit, and wine; we started off again, in high spirits, at half-past six o'clock next morning, very much delighted to be by ourselves, and disposed to enjoy even the roughest journey.

It was well, for us that we were in this humour, for the road we went over that day was certainly enough to have shaken tempers that were not resolutely at Set Fair down to some inches below Stormy. At one time we were all flung together in a heap at the bottom of the coach, and at another we were crushing our heads against the roof. Now one side was down deep in the mire, and we were holding on to the other. Now the coach was lying on the tails of the two wheelers; and now it was rearing up in the air, in a frantic state, with all four horses standing on the top of an insurmountable eminence, looking coolly back at it, as though they would say, "Unharness us. It can't be done." The drivers on these roads, who certainly get over the road in a manner which is quite miraculous, so twist and turn the team about in forcing a passage, corkscrew fashion, through the bogs and swamps, that it was quite a common circumstance, on looking out of the window, to see the coachman, with the ends of a pair of reins in his hands, apparently driving nothing, or playing at horses, and the leaders staring at one unexpectedly from the back of the coach, as if they had some idea of getting up behind. A great portion of the way was over what is called a corduroy road, which is made by throwing trunks of trees into a marsh, and leaving them to settle there. The very slightest of the jolts with which the ponderous carriage fell from log to log was enough, it seemed, to have dislocated all the bones in the human body. It would be impossible to experience a similar set of sensations in any other circumstances, unless, perhaps, in attempting to go up to the top of St. Paul's in an omnibus. Never, never once, that day, was the coach in any position, attitude, or kind of motion to which we are accustomed in coaches. Never did it make the smallest approach to one's experience of the proceedings of any sort of vehicle that goes on wheels.

Still, it was a fine day, and the temperature was delicious, and though we had left Summer behind us in the west, and were fast leaving Spring, we were moving towards Niagara and home. We alighted in a pleasant wood towards the middle of the day, dined on a fallen tree, and leaving our best fragments with a cottager, and our worst with the pigs (who swarm in this part of the country like grains of sand on the seashore, to the great comfort of our commissariat in Canada), we went forward again gaily.

As night came on, the track grew narrower and narrower, until at last it so lost itself among the trees, that the driver seemed to find his way by instinct. We had the comfort of knowing, at least, that there was no danger of his falling asleep, for every now and then a wheel would strike against an unseen stump with such a jerk, that he was fain to hold on pretty tight and pretty quick, to keep himself upon the box. Nor was there any reason to dread the least danger from furious driving, inasmuch as over that broken ground the horses had enough to do to walk; as to shying, there was no room for that; and a herd of wild elephants could not have run away in such a wood, with such a coach at their heels. So we stumbled along, quite satisfied.

These stumps of trees are a curious feature in American travelling. The varying illusions they present to the unaccustomed eye, as it grows dark, are quite astonishing in their number and reality. Now there is a Grecian urn erected in the centre of a lonely field; now there is a woman weeping at a tomb; now a very commonplace old gentleman in a white waistcoat, with a thumb thrust into each armhole of his coat; now a student poring on a book; now a crouching negro; now a horse, a dog, a cannon, an armed man; a hunchback throwing off his cloak and stepping forth into the light. They were often as entertaining to me as so many glasses in a magic lantern, and never took their shapes at my bidding, but seemed to force themselves upon me, whether I would or no; and, strange to say, I sometimes recognised in them counterparts of figures once familiar to me, in pictures attached to childish books, forgotten long ago.

It soon became too dark, however, even for this amusement, and the trees were so close together that their dry branches rattled against the coach on either side, and obliged us all to keep our heads within. It lightened, too, for three whole hours; each flash being very bright, and blue, and long; and as the vivid streaks came darting in among the crowded branches, and the thunder rolled gloomily above the tree-tops, one could scarcely help thinking that there

were better neighbourhoods at such a time than thick woods afforded.

At length, between ten and eleven o'clock at night, a few feeble lights appeared in the distance, and Upper Sandusky, an Indian village, where we were to stay till morning, lay before us.

They were gone to bed at the log-inn, which was the only house of entertainment in the place, but soon answered to our knocking, and got some tea for us in a sort of kitchen or common room, tapestried with old newspapers, pasted against the wall. The bedchamber to which my wife and I were shown was a large, low, ghostly room; with a quantity of withered branches on the hearth, and two doors without any fastening, opposite to each other, both opening on the black night and wild country, and so contrived that one of them always blew the other open: a novelty in domestic architecture which I do not remember to have seen before, and which I was somewhat disconcerted to have forced on my attention after getting into bed, as I had a considerable sum in gold, for our travelling expenses, in my dressing-case. Some of the luggage, however, piled against the panels, soon settled this difficulty, and my sleep would not have been very much affected that night, I believe, though it had failed to do so.

My Boston friend climbed up to bed somewhere in the roof, where another guest was already snoring hugely. But, being bitten beyond his power of endurance, he turned out again, and fled for shelter to the coach, which was airing itself in front of the house. This was not a very politic step as it turned out, for the pigs scenting him, and looking upon the coach as a kind of pie with some manner of meat inside, grunted round it so hideously, that he was afraid to come out again, and lay there shivering till morning. Nor was it possible to warm him, when he did come out, by means of a glass of brandy; for in Indian villages, the legislature, with a very good and wise intention, forbids the sale of spirits by tavern-keepers. The precaution, however, is quite inefficacious, for the Indians never fail to procure liquor of a worse kind, at a dearer price, from travelling pedlers.

It is a settlement of the Wyandot Indians who inhabit this place. Among the company at breakfast was a mild old gentleman, who had been for many years employed by the United States Government in conducting negotiations with the Indians, and who had just concluded a treaty with these people by which they bound themselves, in consideration of a certain annual sum, to remove next year to some land provided for them west of the Mississippi, and a little way beyond St. Louis. He gave me a moving account of their strong attachment to the familiar scenes of their infancy, and in particular to the burial-places of their kindred; and of their great reluctance to leave them. He had witnessed many such removals, and always with pain, though he knew that they departed for their own good. The question whether this tribe should go or stay had been discussed among them a day or two before, in a hut erected for the purpose, the logs of which still lay upon the ground before the inn. When the speaking was done, the ayes and noes were ranged on opposite sides, and every male adult voted in his turn. The moment the result was known, the minority (a large one) cheerfully yielded to the rest, and withdrew all kind of opposition.

We met some of these poor Indians afterwards, riding on shaggy ponies. They were so like the meaner sort of gipsies, that if I could have seen any of them in England, I should have concluded, as a matter of course, that they belonged to that wandering and restless people.

Leaving this town directly after breakfast, we pushed forward again, over a rather worse road than yesterday, if possible, and arrived about noon at Tiffin, where we parted with the extra. At two o'clock we took the railroad; the travelling on which was very slow, its construction being indifferent, and the ground wet and marshy; and arrived at Sandusky in time to dine that evening. We put up at a comfortable little hotel on the brink of Lake Erie, lay there that night, and had no choice but to wait there next day, until a steamboat bound for Buffalo appeared. The town, which was sluggish and uninteresting enough, was something like the back of an English watering-place out of the season.

Our host, who was very attentive and anxious to make us comfortable, was a handsome middle-aged man, who had come to this town from New England, in which part of the country he was "raised." When I say that he constantly walked in and out of the room with his hat on; and stopped to converse in the same free-and-easy state; and lay down on our sofa, and pulled his newspaper out of his pocket, and read it at his ease; I merely mention these traits as characteristic of the country: not at all as being matter of complaint, or as having been disagreeable to me. I should undoubtedly be offended by such proceedings at home, because there they are not the custom, and where they are not, they would be impertinences; but, in America, the only desire of a good-natured fellow

of this kind is to treat his guests hospitably and well; and I had no more right, and I can truly say no more disposition, to measure his conduct by our English rule and standard, than I had to quarrel with him for not being of the exact stature which would qualify him for admission into the Queen's Grenadier Guards. As little inclination had I to find fault with the funny old lady who was an upper domestic in this establishment, and who, when she came to wait upon us at any meal, sat herself down comfortably in the most convenient chair, and, producing a large pin to pick her teeth with, remained performing that ceremony, and steadfastly regarding us meanwhile with much gravity and composure (now and then pressing us to eat a little more), until it was time to clear away. It was enough for us that whatever we wished done was done with great civility and readiness, and a desire to oblige, not only here, but everywhere else; and that all our wants were, in general, zealously anticipated.

We were taking an early dinner at this house, on the day after our arrival, which was Sunday, when a steamboat came in sight, and presently touched at the wharf. As she proved to be on her way to Buffalo, we hurried on board with all speed, and soon left Sandusky far behind us.

She was a large vessel of five hundred tons, and handsomely fitted up, though with high-pressure engines; which always conveyed that kind of feeling to me which I should be likely to experience, I think, if I had lodgings on the first floor of a powder-mill. She was laden with flour, some casks of which commodity were stored upon the deck. The captain coming up to have a little conversation, and to introduce a friend, seated himself astride of one of these barrels, like a Bacchus of private life; and pulling a great clasp-knife out of his pocket, began to "whittle" it as he talked, by paring thin slices off the edges. And he whittled with such industry and hearty good-will, that but for his being called away very soon, it must have disappeared bodily, and left nothing in its place but grist and shavings.

After calling at one or two flat places, with low dams stretching out into the lake, whereon were stumpy lighthouses, like windmills without sails, the whole looking like a Dutch vignette, we came at midnight to Cleveland, where we lay all night, and until nine o'clock next morning.

I entertained quite a curiosity in reference to this place, from having seen at Sandusky a specimen of its literature in the shape of a newspaper, which was very strong indeed upon the subject of Lord Ashburton's recent arrival at Washington, to adjust the points in dispute between the United States Government and Great Britain: informing its readers that as America had "whipped" England in her infancy, and whipped her again in her youth, so it was clearly necessary that she must whip her once again in her maturity: and pledging its credit to all True Americans, that if Mr. Webster did his duty in the approaching negotiations, and sent the English Lord home again in double-quick time, they should, within two years, sing "Yankee Doodle in Hyde Park, and Hail Columbia in the scarlet courts of Westminster!" I found it a pretty town, and had the satisfaction of beholding the outside of the office of the journal from which I have just quoted. I did not enjoy the delight of seeing the wit who indited the paragraphs in question, but I have no doubt he is a prodigious man in his way, and held in high repute by a select circle.

There was a gentleman on board, to whom, as I unintentionally learned through the thin partition which divided our state-room from the cabin in which he and his wife conversed together, I was unwittingly the occasion of very great uneasiness. I don't know why or wherefore, but I appeared to run in his mind perpetually, and to dissatisfy him very much. First of all I heard him say: and the most ludicrous part of the business was, that he said it in my very ear, and could not have communicated more directly with me, if he had leaned upon my shoulder, and whispered me: "Boz is on board still, my dear." After a considerable pause he added, complainingly, "Boz keeps himself very close:" which was true enough, for I was not very well, and was lying down, with a book. I thought he had done with me after this, but I was deceived; for a long interval having elapsed, during which I imagine him to have been turning restlessly from side to side, and trying to go to sleep, he broke out again with, "I suppose *that* Boz will be writing a book by-and-by, and putting all our names in it!" at which imaginary consequence of being on board a boat with Boz, he groaned, and became silent.

We called at the town of Erie at eight o'clock that night, and lay there an hour. Between five and six next morning we arrived at Buffalo, where we breakfasted; and, being too near the Great Falls to wait patiently anywhere else, we set off by the train, the same morning, at nine o'clock, to Niagara.

It was a miserable day; chilly and raw; a damp mist falling; and the trees in that northern region quite bare and wintry. Whenever the train halted, I listened for the roar; and was

constantly straining my eyes in the direction where I knew the Falls must be, from seeing the river rolling on towards them; every moment expecting to behold the spray. Within a few minutes of our stopping, not before, I saw two great white clouds rising up slowly and majestically from the depths of the earth. That was all. At length we alighted: and then, for the first time, I heard the mighty rush of water, and felt the ground tremble underneath my feet.

The bank is very steep, and was slippery with rain and half-melted ice. I hardly know how I got down, but I was soon at the bottom, and climbing, with two English officers who were crossing and had joined me, over some broken rocks, deafened by the noise, half blinded by the spray, and wet to the skin. We were at the foot of the American Fall. I could see an immense torrent of water tearing headlong down from some great height, but had no idea of shape, or situation, or anything but vague immensity.

When we were seated in the little ferry-boat, and were crossing the swollen river immediately before both cataracts, I began to feel what it was: but I was in a manner stunned, and unable to comprehend the vastness of the scene. It was not until I came on Table Rock, and looked—Great Heaven, on what a fall of bright green water!—that it came upon me in its full might and majesty.

Then, when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect, and the enduring one—instant and lasting—of the tremendous spectacle, was Peace. Peace of Mind, tranquillity, calm recollections of the Dead, great thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness: nothing of gloom or terror. Niagara was at once stamped upon my heart, an Image of Beauty; to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, for ever.

Oh, how the strife and trouble of daily life receded from my view, and lessened in the distance, during the ten memorable days we passed on that Enchanted Ground! What voices spoke from out the thundering water; what faces, faded from the earth, looked out upon me from its gleaming depths; what Heavenly promise glistened in those angels' tears, the drops of many hues, that showered around, and twined themselves about the gorgeous arches which the changing rainbows made!

I never stirred in all that time from the Canadian side, whither I had gone at first. I never crossed the river again; for I knew there were people on the other shore, and in such a place it is natural to shun strange company. To wander to and fro all day, and see the cataracts from all points of view; to stand upon the edge of the Great Horse-shoe Fall, marking the hurried water gathering strength as it approached the verge, yet seeming, too, to pause before it shot into the gulf below; to gaze from the river's level up at the torrent as it came streaming down; to climb the neighbouring heights and watch it through the trees, and see the wreathing water in the rapids hurrying on to take its fearful plunge; to linger in the shadow of the solemn rocks three miles below; watching the river as, stirred by no visible cause, it heaved and eddied and awoke the echoes, being troubled yet, far down beneath the surface, by its giant leap; to have Niagara before me lighted by the sun and by the moon, red in the day's decline, and grey as evening slowly fell upon it; to look upon it every day, and wake up in the night and hear its ceaseless voice: this was enough.

I think in every quiet season now, still do those waters roll and leap, and roar and tumble, all day long; still are the rainbows spanning them, a hundred feet below. Still, when the sun is on them, do they shine and glow like molten gold. Still, when the day is gloomy, do they fall like snow, or seem to crumble away like the front of a great chalk cliff, or roll down the rock like dense white smoke. But always does the mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist, which is never laid: which has haunted this place with the same dread solemnity since Darkness brooded on the deep, and that first flood before the Deluge—Light—came rushing on Creation at the word of God.

CHAPTER XV.

IN CANADA; TORONTO; KINGSTON; MONTREAL; QUEBEC; ST. JOHN'S. IN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN: LEBANON; THE SHAKER VILLAGE; AND WEST POINT.

I WISH to abstain from instituting any comparison, or drawing any parallel whatever, between the social features of the United States and those of the British possessions in Canada. For this reason, I shall confine myself to a very brief account of our journeyings in the latter territory.

But, before I leave Niagara, I must advert to one disgusting circumstance, which can hardly

have escaped the observation of any decent traveller who has visited the Falls.

On Table Rock there is a cottage belonging to a Guide, where little relics of the place are sold, and where visitors register their names in a book kept for the purpose. On the wall of the room in which a great many of these volumes are preserved, the following request is posted: "Visitors will please not copy nor extract the remarks and poetical effusions from the registers and albums kept here."

But for this intimation, I should have let them lie upon the tables on which they were strewn with careful negligence, like books in a drawing-room: being quite satisfied with the stupendous silliness of certain stanzas with an anti-climax at the end of each, which were framed and hung up on the wall. Curious, however, after reading this announcement, to see what kind of morsels were so carefully preserved, I turned a few leaves, and found them scrawled all over with the vilest and the filthiest ribaldry that ever human hogs delighted in.

It is humiliating enough to know that there are among men brutes so obscene and worthless, that they can delight in laying their miserable profanations upon the very steps of Nature's greatest altar. But that these should be hoarded up for the delight of their fellow-swine, and kept in a public place where any eyes may see them, is a disgrace to the English language in which they are written (though I hope few of these entries have been made by Englishmen), and a reproach to the English side, on which they are preserved.

The quarters of our soldiers at Niagara are finely and airily situated. Some of them are large detached houses on the plain above the Falls, which were originally designed for hotels; and in the evening-time, when the women and children were leaning over the balconies watching the men as they played at ball and other games upon the grass before the door, they often presented a little picture of cheerfulness and animation which made it quite a pleasure to pass that way.

At any garrisoned point where the line of demarcation between one country and another is so very narrow as at Niagara, desertion from the ranks can scarcely fail to be of frequent occurrence: and it may be reasonably supposed that when the soldiers entertain the wildest and maddest hopes of the fortune and independence that await them on the other side, the impulse to play traitor, which such a place suggests to dishonest minds, is not weakened. But it very rarely happens that the men who do desert are happy or contented afterwards; and many instances have been known in which they have confessed their grievous disappointment, and their earnest desire to return to their old service, if they could but be assured of pardon, or of lenient treatment. Many of their comrades, notwithstanding, do the like from time to time; and instances of loss of life in the effort to cross the river with this object are far from being uncommon. Several men were drowned in the attempt to swim across, not long ago; and one, who had the madness to trust himself upon a table as a raft, was swept down to the whirlpool, where his mangled body eddied round and round some days.

I am inclined to think that the noise of the Falls is very much exaggerated; and this will appear the more probable when the depth of the great basin in which the water is received is taken into account. At no time during our stay there was the wind at all high or boisterous, but we never heard them three miles off, even at the very quiet time of sunset, though we often tried.

Queenston, at which place the steamboats start for Toronto (or I should rather say at which place they call, for their wharf is at Lewiston, on the opposite shore), is situated in a delicious valley, through which the Niagara River, in colour a very deep green, pursues its course. It is approached by a road that takes its winding way among the heights by which the town is sheltered; and, seen from this point, is extremely beautiful and picturesque. On the most conspicuous of these heights stood a monument erected by the Provincial Legislature in memory of General Brock, who was slain in a battle with the American Forces, after having won the victory. Some vagabond, supposed to be a fellow of the name of Lett, who is now, or who lately was, in prison as a felon, blew up this monument two years ago, and it is now a melancholy ruin, with a long fragment of iron railing hanging dejectedly from its top, and waving to and fro like a wild ivy branch or broken vine stem. It is of much higher importance than it may seem, that this statue should be repaired at the public cost, as it ought to have been long ago. Firstly, because it is beneath the dignity of England to allow a memorial raised in honour of one of her defenders to remain in this condition, on the very spot where he died. Secondly, because the sight of it in its present state, and the recollection of the unpunished outrage which brought it to this pass, is not very likely to soothe down border feelings among English subjects here, or compose their border quarrels and dislikes.

I was standing on the wharf at this place, watching the passengers embarking in a steamboat which preceded that whose coming we awaited, and participating in the anxiety with which a sergeant's wife was collecting her few goods together—keeping one distracted eye hard upon the porters, who were hurrying them on board, and the other on a hoopless washing-tub for which, as being the most utterly worthless of all her movables, she seemed to entertain particular affection—when three or four soldiers with a recruit came up, and went on board.

The recruit was a likely young fellow enough, strongly built and well made, but by no means sober: indeed, he had all the air of a man who had been more or less drunk for some days. He carried a small bundle over his shoulder, slung at the end of a walking-stick, and had a short pipe in his mouth. He was as dusty and dirty as recruits usually are, and his shoes betokened that he had travelled on foot some distance, but he was in a very jocose state, and shook hands with this soldier, and clapped that one on the back, and talked and laughed continually, like a roaring idle dog as he was.

The soldiers rather laughed at this blade than with him: seeming to say, as they stood straightening their canes in their hands, and looking coolly at him over their glazed stocks, "Go on, my boy, while you may! you'll know better by-and-by:" when suddenly the novice, who had been backing towards the gangway in his noisy merriment, fell overboard before their eyes, and splashed heavily down into the river between the vessel and the dock.

I never saw such a good thing as the change that came over these soldiers in an instant. Almost before the man was down, their professional manner, their stiffness and constraint, were gone, and they were filled with the most violent energy. In less time than is required to tell it, they had him out again, feet first, with the tails of his coat flapping over his eyes, everything about him hanging the wrong way, and the water streaming off at every thread in his threadbare dress. But the moment they set him upright, and found that he was none the worse, they were soldiers again, looking over their glazed stocks more composedly than ever.

The half-sobered recruit glanced round for a moment, as if his first impulse were to express some gratitude for his preservation, but seeing them with this air of total unconcern, and having his wet pipe presented to him with an oath by the soldier who had been by far the most anxious of the party, he stuck it in his mouth, thrust his hands into his moist pockets, and without even shaking the water off his clothes, walked on board whistling; not to say as if nothing had happened, but as if he had meant to do it, and it had been a perfect success.

Our steamboat came up directly this had left the wharf, and soon bore us to the mouth of the Niagara; where the stars and stripes of America flutter on one side, and the Union Jack of England on the other: and so narrow is the space between them that the sentinels in either fort can often hear the watchword of the other country given. Thence we emerged on Lake Ontario, an inland sea; and by half-past six o'clock were at Toronto.

The country round this town, being very flat, is bare of scenic interest; but the town itself is full of life and motion, bustle, business, and improvement. The streets are well paved, and lighted with gas; the houses are large and good; the shops excellent. Many of them have a display of goods in their windows, such as may be seen in thriving county towns in England; and there are some which would do no discredit to the metropolis itself. There is a good stone prison here; and there are, besides, a handsome church, a Court-house, public offices, many commodious private residences, and a Government Observatory for noting and recording the magnetic variations. In the College of Upper Canada, which is one of the public establishments of the city, a sound education in every department of polite learning can be had at a very moderate expense: the annual charge for the instruction of each pupil not exceeding nine pounds sterling. It has pretty good endowments in the way of land, and is a valuable and useful institution.

The first stone of a new college had been laid but a few days before by the Governor General. It will be a handsome, spacious edifice, approached by a long avenue, which is already planted and made available as a public walk. The town is well adapted for wholesome exercise at all seasons, for the footways in the thoroughfares which lie beyond the principal street are planked like floors, and kept in very good and clean repair.

It is a matter of deep regret that political differences should have run high in this place, and led to most discreditable and disgraceful results. It is not long since guns were discharged from a window in this town at the successful candidates in an election, and the coachman of one of them was actually shot in the body, though not dangerously wounded. But one man was killed on the same occasion; and from the very window whence he received

his death, the very flag which shielded his murderer (not only in the commission of his crime, but from its consequences), was displayed again on the occasion of the public ceremony performed by the Governor General to which I have just adverted. Of all the colours in the rainbow, there is but one which could be so employed: I need not say that flag was orange.

The time of leaving Toronto for Kingston is noon. By eight o'clock next morning the traveller is at the end of his journey, which is performed by steamboat upon Lake Ontario, calling at Port Hope and Coburg, the latter a cheerful, thriving little town. Vast quantities of flour form the chief item in the freight of these vessels. We had no fewer than one thousand and eighty barrels on board between Coburg and Kingston.

The latter place, which is now the seat of government in Canada, is a very poor town, rendered still poorer in the appearance of its market-place by the ravages of a recent fire. Indeed, it may be said of Kingston, that one half of it appears to be burnt down, and the other half not to be built up. The Government House is neither elegant nor commodious, yet it is almost the only house of any importance in the neighbourhood.

There is an admirable gaol here, well and wisely governed, and excellently regulated in every respect. The men were employed as shoemakers, ropemakers, blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, and stone-cutters; and in building a new prison, which was pretty far advanced towards completion. The female prisoners were occupied in needlework. Among them was a beautiful girl of twenty, who had been there nearly three years. She acted as bearer of secret dispatches for the self-styled Patriots on Navy Island during the Canadian Insurrection: sometimes dressing as a girl, and carrying them in her stays; sometimes attiring herself as a boy, and secreting them in the lining of her hat. In the latter character she always rode as a boy would, which was nothing to her, for she could govern any horse that any man could ride, and could drive four-in-hand with the best whip in those parts. Setting forth on one of her patriotic missions, she appropriated to herself the first horse she could lay her hands on; and this offence had brought her where I saw her. She had quite a lovely face, though, as the reader may suppose from this sketch of her history, there was a lurking devil in her bright eye, which looked out pretty sharply from between her prison bars.

There is a bomb-proof fort here of great strength, which occupies a bold position, and is capable, doubtless, of doing good service; though the town is much too close upon the frontier to be long held, I should imagine, for its present purpose in troubled times. There is also a small navy-yard, where a couple of Government steamboats were building, and getting on vigorously.

We left Kingston for Montreal on the tenth of May, at half-past nine in the morning, and proceeded in a steamboat down the St. Lawrence River. The beauty of this noble stream at almost any point, but especially in the commencement of this journey, when it winds its way among the thousand Islands, can hardly be imagined. The number and constant successions of these islands, all green and richly wooded; their fluctuating sizes, some so large that for half an hour together one among them will appear as the opposite bank of the river, and some so small that they are mere dimples on its broad bosom; their infinite variety of shapes; and the numberless combinations of beautiful forms which the trees growing on them present; all form a picture fraught with uncommon interest and pleasure.

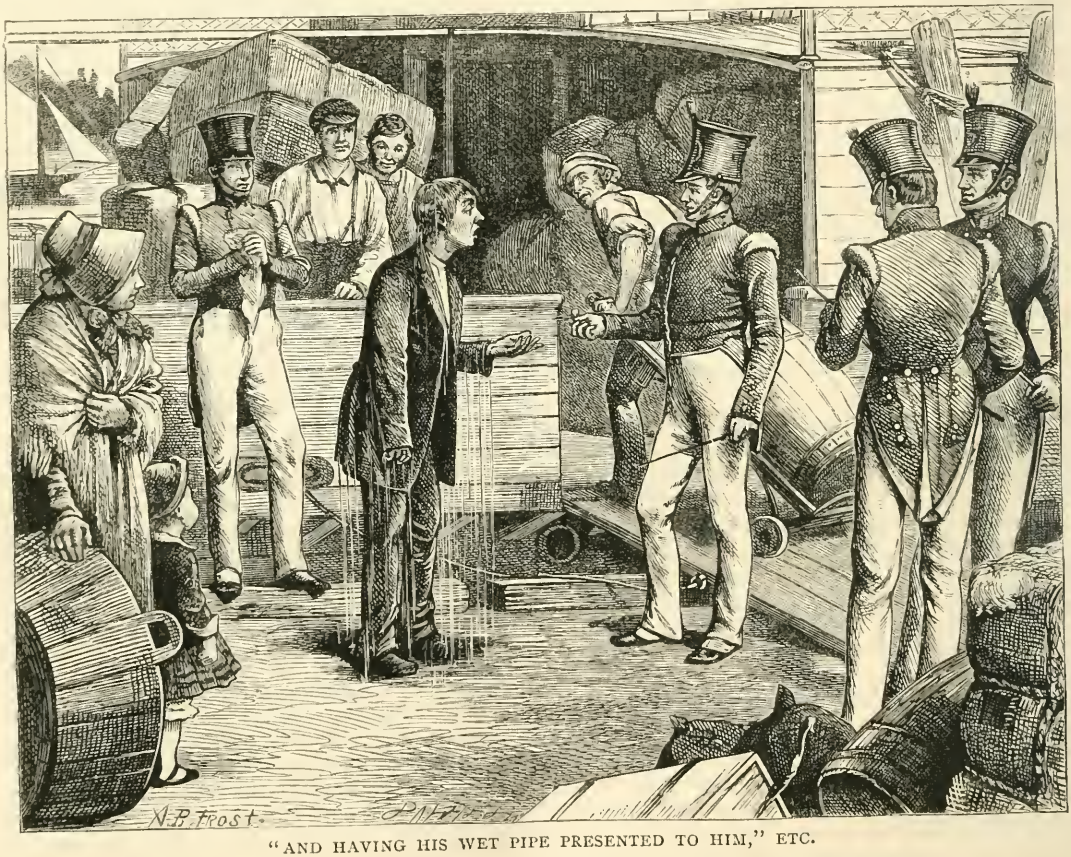
In the afternoon we shot down some rapids where the river boiled and bubbled strangely, and where the force and headlong violence of the current were tremendous. At seven o'clock we reached Dickenson's Landing, whence travellers proceed for two or three hours by stage-coach: the navigation of the river being rendered so dangerous and difficult in the interval, by rapids, that steamboats do not make the passage. The number and length of those *portages*, over which the roads are bad, and the travelling slow, render the way between the towns of Montreal and Kingston somewhat tedious.

Our course lay over a wide, unenclosed tract of country at a little distance from the river-side, whence the bright warning lights on the dangerous parts of the St. Lawrence shone vividly. The night was dark and raw, and the way dreary enough. It was nearly ten o'clock when we reached the wharf where the next steamboat lay; and went on board, and to bed.

She lay there all night, and started as soon as it was day. The morning was ushered in by a violent thunder-storm, and was very wet, but gradually improved and brightened up. Going on deck after breakfast, I was amazed to see floating down with the stream, a most gigantic raft, with some thirty or forty wooden houses upon it, and at least as many flag masts, so that it looked like a nautical street. I saw many of these rafts afterwards, but never one so large.

All the timber, or "lumber," as it is called in America, which is brought down the St. Lawrence, is floated down in this manner. When the raft reaches its place of destination, it is broken up; the materials are sold; and the boatmen return for more.

At eight we landed again, and travelled by a stage-coach for four hours through a pleasant and well-cultivated country, perfectly French in every respect: in the appearance of the cottages; the air, language, and dress of the peasantry, the sign-boards on the shops and taverns; and the Virgin's shrines and crosses by the wayside. Nearly every common labourer and boy, though he had no shoes to his feet, wore round his waist a sash of some bright colour: generally red: and the women, who were working in the fields and gardens, and doing all kinds of husbandry, wore, one and all, great flat straw hats with most capacious brims. There were Catholic Priests and Sisters of Charity in the village streets; and images of the Saviour at the



"AND HAVING HIS WET PIPE PRESENTED TO HIM," ETC.

corners of cross-roads, and in other public places.

At noon we went on board another steamboat, and reached the village of Lachine, nine miles from Montreal, by three o'clock. There we left the river, and went on by land.

Montreal is pleasantly situated on the margin of the St. Lawrence, and is backed by some bold heights, about which there are charming rides and drives. The streets are generally narrow and irregular, as in most French towns of any age; but, in the more modern parts of the city, they are wide and airy. They display a great variety of very good shops; and both in the town and suburbs there are many excellent private dwellings. The granite quays are remarkable for their beauty, solidity, and extent.

There is a very large Catholic cathedral here, recently erected; with two tall spires, of which one is yet unfinished. In the open space in front of this edifice stands a solitary, grim-looking, square brick tower, which has a quaint and re-

markable appearance, and which the wiseacres of the place have consequently determined to pull down immediately. The Government House is very superior to that at Kingston, and the town is full of life and bustle. In one of the suburbs is a plank road—not footpath—five or six miles long, and a famous road it is too. All the rides in the vicinity were made doubly interesting by the bursting out of spring, which is here so rapid, that it is but a day's leap from barren winter to the blooming youth of summer.

The steamboats to Quebec perform the journey in the night; that is to say, they leave Montreal at six in the evening, and arrive in Quebec at six next morning. We made this excursion during our stay in Montreal (which exceeded a fortnight), and were charmed by its interest and beauty.

The impression made upon the visitor by this Gibraltar of America: its giddy heights; its citadel suspended, as it were, in the air; its picturesque steep streets and frowning gateways; and the splendid views which burst upon the eye at every turn: is at once unique and lasting.

It is a place not to be forgotten, or mixed up in the mind with other places, or altered for a moment in the crowd of scenes a traveller can recall. Apart from the realities of this most picturesque city, there are associations clustering about it which would make a desert rich in interest. The dangerous precipice along whose rocky front Wolfe and his brave companions climbed to glory; the Plains of Abraham, where he received his mortal wound; the fortress so chivalrously defended by Montcalm; and his soldier's grave, dug for him, while yet alive, by the bursting of a shell; are not the least among them, or among the gallant incidents of history. That is a noble Monument, too, and worthy of two great nations, which perpetuates the memory of both brave generals, and on which their names are jointly written.

The city is rich in public institutions and in Catholic churches and charities, but it is mainly in the prospect from the site of the Old Government House, and from the Citadel, that its surpassing beauty lies. The exquisite expanse of country, rich in field and forest, mountain height and water, which lies stretched out before the view, with miles of Canadian villages, glancing in long white streaks, like veins along the landscape; the motley crowd of gables, roofs, and chimney-tops in the old hilly town immediately at hand; the beautiful St. Lawrence sparkling and flashing in the sun-light; and the tiny ships below the rock from which you gaze, whose distant rigging looks like spiders' webs against the light, while casks and barrels on their decks dwindle into toys, and busy mariners become so many puppets: all this, framed by a sunken window in the fortress, and looked at from the shadowed room within, forms one of the brightest and most enchanting pictures that the eye can rest upon.

In the spring of the year, vast numbers of emigrants, who have newly arrived from England or from Ireland, pass between Quebec and Montreal, on their way to the back-woods and new settlements of Canada. If it be an entertaining lounge (as I very often found it) to take a morning stroll upon the quay at Montreal, and see them grouped in hundreds on the public wharfs about their chests and boxes, it is matter of deep interest to be their fellow-passenger on one of these steamboats, and, mingling with the concourse, see and hear them unobserved.

The vessel in which we returned from Quebec to Montreal was crowded with them, and at night they spread their beds between decks (those who had beds, at least), and slept so close and thick about our cabin door, that the passage to and fro was quite blocked up. They were nearly all English; from Gloucestershire the greater part; and had had a long winter passage out; but it was wonderful to see how clean the children had been kept, and how untiring in their love and self-denial all the poor parents were.

Cant as we may, and as we shall to the end of all things, it is very much harder for the poor to be virtuous than it is for the rich; and the good that is in them shines the brighter for it. In many a noble mansion lives a man, the best of husbands and of fathers, whose private worth in both capacities is justly lauded to the skies. But bring him here, upon this crowded deck. Strip from his fair young wife her silken dress and jewels, unbind her braided hair, stamp early wrinkles on her brow, pinch her pale cheek with care and much privation, array her faded form in coarsely-patched attire, let there be nothing but his love to set her forth or deck her out, and you shall put it to the proof indeed. So change his station in the world, that he shall see in those young things who climb about his knee: not records of his wealth and name: but little wrestlers with him for his daily bread; so many poachers on his scanty meal; so many units to divide his every sum of comfort, and farther to reduce its small amount. In lieu of the endearments of childhood in its sweetest aspect, heap upon him all its pains and wants, its sicknesses and ills, its fretfulness, caprice, and

querulous endurance: let its prattle be, not of engaging infant fancies, but of cold, and thirst, and hunger: and if his fatherly affection outlive all this, and he be patient, watchful, tender; careful of his children's lives, and mindful always of their joys and sorrows; then send him back to Parliament, and Pulpit, and to Quarter Sessions, and when he hears fine talk of the depravity of those who live from hand to mouth, and labour hard to do it, let him speak up, as one who knows, and tell those holders forth that they, by parallel with such a class, should be High Angels in their daily lives, and lay but humble siege to Heaven at last.

Which of us shall say what he would be, if such realities, with small relief or change all through his days, were his? Looking round upon these people; far from home, houseless, indigent, wandering, weary with travel and hard living: and seeing how patiently they nursed and tended their young children; how they consulted ever their wants first, then half supplied their own; what gentle ministers of hope and faith the women were; how the men profited by their example; and how very, very seldom even a moment's petulance or harsh complaint broke out among them: I felt a stronger love and honour of my kind come glowing on my heart, and wished to God there had been many Atheists in the better part of human nature there, to read this simple lesson in the book of Life.

We left Montreal for New York again on the thirtieth of May; crossing to La Prairie, on the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence, in a steamboat; we then took the railroad to St. John's, which is on the brink of Lake Champlain. Our last greeting in Canada was from the English officers in the pleasant barracks at that place (a class of gentlemen who had made every hour of our visit memorable by their hospitality and friendship); and, with "Rule Britannia" sounding in our ears, soon left it far behind.

But Canada has held, and always will retain, a foremost place in my remembrance. Few Englishmen are prepared to find it what it is. Advancing quietly; old differences settling down, and being fast forgotten; public feeling and private enterprise alike in a sound and wholesome state; nothing of flush or fever in its system, but health and vigour throbbing in its steady pulse: it is full of hope and promise. To me—who had been accustomed to think of it as something left behind in the strides of advancing society, as something neglected and forgotten, slumbering and wasting in its sleep—the demand for labour and the rates of wages; the busy quays of Montreal; the vessels taking in their cargoes, and discharging them; the amount of shipping in the different ports; the commerce, roads, and public works, all made *to last;* the respectability and character of the public journals; and the amount of rational comfort and happiness which honest industry may earn: were very great surprises. The steamboats on the lakes, in their conveniences, cleanliness, and safety; in the gentlemanly character and bearing of their captains; and in the politeness and perfect comfort of their social regulations; are unsurpassed even by the famous Scotch vessels, deservedly so much esteemed at home. The inns are usually bad; because the custom of boarding at hotels is not so general here as in the States, and the British officers, who form a large portion of the society of every town, live chiefly at the regimental messes: but, in every other respect, the traveller in Canada will find as good provision for his comfort as in any place I know.

There is one American boat—the vessel which carried us on Lake Champlain, from St. John's to Whitehall—which I praise very highly, but no more than it deserves, when I say that it is superior even to that in which we went from Queenston to Toronto, or to that in which we travelled from the latter place to Kingston, or, I have no doubt I may add, to any other in the world. This steamboat, which is called the Burlington, is a perfectly exquisite achievement of neatness, elegance, and order. The decks are drawing-rooms; the cabins are boudoirs, choicely furnished and adorned with prints, pictures, and musical instruments; every nook and corner in the vessel is a perfect curiosity of graceful comfort and beautiful contrivance. Captain Sherman, her commander, to whose ingenuity and excellent taste these results are solely attributable, has bravely and worthily distinguished himself on more than one trying occasion: not least among them in having the moral courage to carry British troops, at a time (during the Canadian rebellion) when no other conveyance was open to them. He and his vessel are held in universal respect, both by his own countrymen and ours; and no man ever enjoyed the popular esteem, who, in his sphere of action, won and wore it better than this gentleman.

By means of this floating palace we were soon in the United States again, and called that evening at Burlington; a pretty town, where we lay an hour or so. We reached Whitehall, where we were to disembark, at six next morning; and might have done so earlier, but that these steamboats lie by for some hours in the

night, in consequence of the lake becoming very narrow at that part of the journey, and difficult of navigation in the dark. Its width is so contracted at one point, indeed, that they are obliged to warp round by means of a rope.

After breakfasting at Whitehall, we took the stage-coach for Albany: a large and busy town, where we arrived between five and six o'clock that afternoon; after a very hot day's journey, for we were now in the height of summer again. At seven we started for New York on board a great North River steamboat, which was so crowded with passengers that the upper deck was like the box lobby of a theatre between the pieces, and the lower one like Tottenham Court Road on a Saturday night. But we slept soundly, notwithstanding, and soon after five o'clock next morning reached New York.

Tarrying here only that day and night to recruit after our late fatigues, we started off once more upon our last journey in America. We had yet five days to spare before embarking for England, and I had a great desire to see "the Shaker Village," which is peopled by a religious sect from whom it takes its name.

To this end, we went up the North River again as far as the town of Hudson, and there hired an extra to carry us to Lebanon, thirty miles distant: and of course another and a different Lebanon from that village where I slept on the night of the Prairie trip.

The country through which the road meandered was rich and beautiful; the weather very fine; and for many miles the Kaatskill Mountains, where Rip Van Winkle and the ghastly Dutchmen played at ninepins one memorable gusty afternoon, towered in the blue distance like stately clouds. At one point, as we ascended a steep hill, athwart whose base a railroad, yet constructing, took its course, we came upon an Irish colony. With means at hand of building decent cabins, it was wonderful to see how clumsy, rough, and wretched its hovels were. The best were poor protection from the weather; the worst let in the wind and rain through wide breaches in the roofs of sodden grass, and in the walls of mud; some had neither door nor window; some had nearly fallen down, and were imperfectly propped up by stakes and poles; all were ruinous and filthy. Hideously ugly old women and very buxom young ones, pigs, dogs, men, children, babies, pots, kettles, dunghills, vile refuse, rank straw, and standing water all wallowing together in an inseparable heap, composed the furniture of every dark and dirty hut.

Between nine and ten o'clock at night we arrived at Lebanon: which is renowned for its warm baths, and for a great hotel, well adapted, I have no doubt, to the gregarious taste of those seekers after health or pleasure who repair here, but inexpressibly comfortless to me. We were shown into an immense apartment, lighted by two dim candles, called the drawing-room: from which there was a descent, by a flight of steps, to another vast desert called the dining-room: our bedchambers were among certain long rows of little whitewashed cells, which opened from either side of a dreary passage; and were so like rooms in a prison that I half expected to be locked up when I went to bed, and listened involuntarily for the turning of the key on the outside. There need be baths somewhere in the neighbourhood, for the other washing arrangements were on as limited a scale as I ever saw, even in America: indeed, these bedrooms were so very bare of even such common luxuries as chairs, that I should say they were not provided with enough of anything, but that I bethink myself of our having been most bountifully bitten all night.

The house is very pleasantly situated, however, and we had a good breakfast. That done, we went to visit our place of destination, which was some two miles off, and the way to which was soon indicated by a finger-post, whereon was painted, "To the Shaker Village."

As we rode along, we passed a party of Shakers, who were at work upon the road; who wore the broadest of all broad-brimmed hats; and were in all visible respects such very wooden men, that I felt about as much sympathy for them, and as much interest in them, as if they had been so many figure-heads of ships. Presently we came to the beginning of the village, and alighting at the door of a house where the Shaker manufactures are sold, and which is the head-quarters of the elders, requested permission to see the Shaker worship.

Pending the conveyance of this request to some person in authority, we walked into a grim room, where several grim hats were hanging on grim pegs, and the time was grimly told by a grim clock, which uttered every tick with a kind of struggle, as if it broke the grim silence reluctantly, and under protest. Ranged against the wall were six or eight stiff, high-backed chairs, and they partook so strongly of the general grimness, that one would much rather have sat on the floor than incurred the smallest obligation to any of them.

Presently, there stalked into this apartment a grim old Shaker, with eyes as hard, and dull,

and cold as the great round metal buttons on his coat and waistcoat; a sort of calm goblin. Being informed of our desire, he produced a newspaper wherein the body of elders, whereof he was a member, had advertised, but a few days before, that in consequence of certain unseemly interruptions which their worship had received from strangers, their chapel was closed to the public for the space of one year.

As nothing was to be urged in opposition to this reasonable arrangement, we requested leave to make some trifling purchases of Shaker goods; which was grimly conceded. We accordingly repaired to a store in the same house, and on the opposite side of the passage, where the stock was presided over by something alive in a russet case, which the elder said was a woman; and which I suppose *was* a woman, though I should not have suspected it.

On the opposite side of the road was their place of worship: a cool, clean edifice of wood, with large windows and green blinds: like a spacious summer-house. As there was no getting into this place, and nothing was to be done but walk up and down, and look at it and the other buildings in the village (which were chiefly of wood, painted a dark red like English barns, and composed of many stories like English factories), I have nothing to communicate to the reader beyond the scanty results I gleaned the while our purchases were making.

These people are called Shakers from their peculiar form of adoration, which consists of a dance, performed by the men and women of all ages, who arrange themselves for that purpose in opposite parties: the men first divesting themselves of their hats and coats, which they gravely hang against the wall before they begin; and tying a ribbon round their shirt-sleeves, as though they were going to be bled. They accompany themselves with a droning, humming noise, and dance until they are quite exhausted, alternately advancing and retiring in a preposterous sort of trot. The effect is said to be unspeakably absurd: and if I may judge from a print of this ceremony which I have in my possession; and which, I am informed by those who have visited the chapel, is perfectly accurate; it must be infinitely grotesque.

They are governed by a woman, and her rule is understood to be absolute, though she has the assistance of a council of elders. She lives, it is said, in strict seclusion, in certain rooms above the chapel, and is never shown to profane eyes. If she at all resemble the lady who presided over the store, it is a great charity to keep her as close as possible, and I cannot too strongly express my perfect concurrence in this benevolent proceeding.

All the possessions and revenues of the settlement are thrown into a common stock, which is managed by the elders. As they have made converts among people who were well to do in the world, and are frugal and thrifty, it is understood that this fund prospers: the more especially as they have made large purchases of land. Nor is this at Lebanon the only Shaker settlement: there are, I think, at least three others.

They are good farmers, and all their produce is eagerly purchased and highly esteemed. "Shaker seeds," "Shaker herbs," and "Shaker distilled waters" are commonly announced for sale in the shops of towns and cities. They are good breeders of cattle, and are kind and merciful to the brute creation. Consequently, Shaker beasts seldom fail to find a ready market.

They eat and drink together, after the Spartan model, at a great public table. There is no union of the sexes; and every Shaker, male and female, is devoted to a life of celibacy. Rumour has been busy upon this theme, but here again I must refer to the lady of the store, and say, that if many of the sister Shakers resemble her, I treat all such slander as bearing on its face the strongest marks of wild improbability. But that they take as proselytes persons so young that they cannot know their own minds, and cannot possess much strength of resolution in this or any other respect, I can assert from my own observation of the extreme juvenility of certain youthful Shakers whom I saw at work among the party on the road.

They are said to be good drivers of bargains, but to be honest and just in their transactions, and even in horse-dealing to resist those thievish tendencies which would seem, for some undiscovered reason, to be almost inseparable from that branch of traffic. In all matters they hold their own course quietly, live in their gloomy, silent commonwealth, and show little desire to interfere with other people.

This is well enough, but nevertheless I cannot, I confess, incline towards the Shakers; view them with much favour, or extend towards them any very lenient construction. I so abhor, and from my soul detest, that bad spirit, no matter by what class or sect it may be entertained, which would strip life of its healthful graces, rob youth of its innocent pleasures, pluck from maturity and age their pleasant ornaments, and make existence but a narrow path towards the grave: that odious spirit which, if it could have

had full scope and sway upon the earth, must have blasted and made barren the imaginations of the greatest men, and left them, in their power of raising up enduring images before their fellow-creatures yet unborn, no better than the beasts: that, in these very broad-brimmed hats and very sombre coats—in stiff-necked, solemn-visaged piety, in short, no matter what its garb, whether it have cropped hair as in a Shaker village, or long nails as in a Hindoo temple—I recognise the worst among the enemies of Heaven and Earth, who turn the water at the marriage feasts of this poor world, not into wine, but gall. And if there must be people vowed to crush the harmless fancies and the love of innocent delights and gaieties, which are a part of human nature: as much a part of it as any other love or hope that is our common portion: let them, for me, stand openly revealed among the ribald and licentious; the very idiots know that *they* are not on the Immortal road, and will despise them, and avoid them readily.

Leaving the Shaker village with a hearty dislike of the old Shakers, and a hearty pity for the young ones: tempered by the strong probability of their running away as they grow older and wiser, which they not uncommonly do: we returned to Lebanon, and so to Hudson, by the way we had come upon the previous day. There we took steamboat down the North River towards New York, but stopped, some four hours' journey short of it, at West Point, where we remained that night, and all next day, and next night too.

In this beautiful place: the fairest among the fair and lovely Highlands of the North River: shut in by deep green heights and ruined forts, and looking down upon the distant town of Newburgh, along a glittering path of sunlit water, with here and there a skiff, whose white sail often bends on some new tack as sudden flaws of wind come down upon her from the gullies in the hills: hemmed in, besides, all round, with memories of Washington and events of the revolutionary war: is the Military School of America.

It could not stand on more appropriate ground, and any ground more beautiful can hardly be. The course of education is severe, but well devised and manly. Through June, July, and August, the young men encamp upon the spacious plain whereon the college stands; and all the year their military exercises are performed there daily. The term of study at this institution, which the State requires from all cadets, is four years; but, whether it be from the rigid nature of the discipline, or the national impatience of restraint, or both causes combined, not more than half the number who begin their studies here ever remain to finish them.

The number of cadets being about equal to that of the members of Congress, one is sent here from every Congressional district: its member influencing the selection. Commissions in the service are distributed on the same principle. The dwellings of the various Professors are beautifully situated; and there is a most excellent hotel for strangers, though it has the two drawbacks of being a total-abstinence house (wines and spirits being forbidden to the students), and of serving the public meals at rather uncomfortable hours: to wit, breakfast at seven, dinner at one, and supper at sunset.

The beauty and freshness of this calm retreat, in the very dawn and greenness of summer—it was then the beginning of June—were exquisite indeed. Leaving it upon the sixth, and returning to New York, to embark for England on the succeeding day, I was glad to think that among the last memorable beauties which had glided past us, and softened in the bright perspective, were those whose pictures, traced by no common hand, are fresh in most men's minds; not easily to grow old, or fade beneath the dust of Time: the Kaatskill Mountains, Sleepy Hollow, and the Tappaan Zee.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PASSAGE HOME.

I NEVER had so much interest before, and very likely I shall never have so much interest again, in the state of the wind as on the long-looked-for morning of Tuesday, the Seventh of June. Some nautical authority had told me, a day or two previous, "Anything with west in it will do;" so when I darted out of bed at daylight, and, throwing up the window, was saluted by a lively breeze from the north-west which had sprung up in the night, it came upon me so freshly, rustling with so many happy associations, that I conceived upon the spot a special regard for all airs blowing from that quarter of the compass, which I shall cherish, I dare say, until my own wind has breathed its last frail puff, and withdrawn itself for ever from the mortal calendar.

The pilot had not been slow to take advantage of this favourable weather, and the ship which yesterday had been in such a crowded dock that she might have retired from trade for

good and all, for any chance she seemed to have of going to sea, was now full sixteen miles away. A gallant sight she was, when we, fast gaining on her in a steamboat, saw her in the distance riding at anchor; her tall masts pointing up in graceful lines against the sky, and every rope and spar expressed in delicate and thread-like outline: gallant, too, when, we being all aboard, the anchor came up to the sturdy chorus, "Cheerily, men, oh, cheerily!" and she followed proudly in the towing steamboat's wake: but bravest and most gallant of all when, the tow-rope being cast adrift, the canvas fluttered from her masts, and, spreading her white wings, she soared away upon her free and solitary course.

In the after-cabin we were only fifteen passengers in all, and the greater part were from Canada, where some of us had known each other. The night was rough and squally, so were the next two days, but they flew by quickly, and we were soon as cheerful and as snug a party, with an honest, manly-hearted captain at our head, as ever came to the resolution of being mutually agreeable, on land or water.

We breakfasted at eight, lunched at twelve, dined at three, and took our tea at half-past seven. We had abundance of amusements, and dinner was not the least among them: firstly, for its own sake; secondly, because of its extraordinary length: its duration, inclusive of all the long pauses between the courses, being seldom less than two hours and a half; which was a subject of never-failing entertainment. By way of beguiling the tediousness of these banquets, a select association was formed at the lower end of the table, below the mast, to whose distinguished president modesty forbids me to make any further allusion, which, being a very hilarious and jovial institution, was (prejudice apart) in high favour with the rest of the community, and particularly with a black steward, who lived for three weeks in a broad grin at the marvellous humour of these incorporated worthies.

Then we had chess for those who played it, whist, cribbage, books, backgammon, and shovel-board. In all weathers, fair or foul, calm or windy, we were every one on deck, walking up and down in pairs, lying in the boats, leaning over the side, or chatting in a lazy group together. We had no lack of music, for one played the accordion, another the violin, and another (who usually began at six o'clock A.M.) the key-bugle: the combined effect of which instruments, when they all played different tunes, in different parts of the ship, at the same time, and within hearing of each other, as they sometimes did (everybody being intensely satisfied with his own performance), was sublimely hideous.

When all these means of entertainment failed, a sail would heave in sight; looming, perhaps, the very spirit of a ship, in the misty distance, or passing us so close that through our glasses we could see the people on her decks, and easily make out her name, and whither she was bound. For hours together we could watch the dolphins and porpoises as they rolled and leaped and dived around the vessel; or those small creatures ever on the wing, the Mother Carey's chickens, which had borne us company from New York Bay, and for a whole fortnight fluttered about the vessel's stern. For some days we had a dead calm; or very light winds, during which the crew amused themselves with fishing, and hooked an unlucky dolphin, who expired, in all his rainbow colours, on the deck: an event of such importance in our barren calendar, that afterwards we dated from the dolphin, and made the day on which he died an era.

Besides all this, when we were five or six days out, there began to be much talk of icebergs, of which wandering islands an unusual number had been seen by the vessels that had come into New York a day or two before we left that port, and of whose dangerous neighbourhood we were warned by the sudden coldness of the weather, and the sinking of the mercury in the barometer. While these tokens lasted, a double look-out was kept, and many dismal tales were whispered, after dark, of ships that had struck upon the ice and gone down in the night; but the wind obliging us to hold a southward course, we saw none of them, and the weather soon grew bright and warm again.

The observation every day at noon, and the subsequent working of the vessel's course, was, as may be supposed, a feature in our lives of paramount importance; nor were there wanting (as there never are) sagacious doubters of the captain's calculations, who, so soon as his back was turned, would, in the absence of compasses, measure the chart with bits of string, and ends of pocket-handkerchiefs, and points of snuffers, and clearly prove him to be wrong by an odd thousand miles or so. It was very edifying to see these unbelievers shake their heads and frown, and hear them hold forth strongly upon navigation: not that they knew anything about it, but that they always mistrusted the captain in calm weather, or when the wind was adverse. Indeed, the mercury itself is not so variable as this class of passengers, whom you will see,

when the ship is going nobly through the water, quite pale with admiration, swearing that the captain beats all captains ever known, and even hinting at subscriptions for a piece of plate; and who, next morning, when the breeze has lulled, and all the sails hang useless in the idle air, shake their despondent heads again, and say, with screwed-up lips, they hope that the captain is a sailor—but they shrewdly doubt him.

It even became an occupation in the calm to wonder when the wind *would* spring up in the favourable quarter, where, it was clearly shown by all the rules and precedents, it ought to have sprung up long ago. The first mate, who whistled for it zealously, was much respected for his perseverance, and was regarded, even by the unbelievers, as a first-rate sailor. Many gloomy looks would be cast upward through the cabin sky-lights at the flapping sails while dinner was in progress; and some, growing bold in rueful-ness, predicted that we should land about the middle of July. There are always on board ship a Sanguine One and a Despondent One. The latter character carried it hollow at this period of the voyage, and triumphed over the Sanguine One at every meal, by inquiring where he supposed the Great Western (which left New York a week after us) was *now:* and where he supposed the Cunard steam-packet was *now:* and what he thought of sailing vessels as compared with steam-ships *now:* and so beset his life with pestilent attacks of that kind, that he, too, was obliged to affect despondency for very peace and quietude.

These were additions to the list of entertaining incidents, but there was still another source of interest. We carried in the steerage nearly a hundred passengers: a little world of poverty: and, as we came to know individuals among them by sight, from looking down upon the deck where they took the air in the daytime, and cooked their food, and very often ate it too, we became curious to know their histories, and with what expectations they had gone out to America, and on what errands they were going home, and what their circumstances were. The information we got on these heads from the carpenter, who had charge of these people, was often of the strangest kind. Some of them had been in America but three days, some but three months, and some had gone out in the last voyage of that very ship in which they were now returning home. Others had sold their clothes to raise the passage-money, and had hardly rags to cover them; others had no food, and lived upon the charity of the rest: and one man, it was discovered nearly at the end of the voyage, not before—for he kept his secret close, and did not court compassion—had had no sustenance whatever but the bones and scraps of fat he took from the plates used in the after-cabin dinner, when they were put out to be washed.

The whole system of shipping and conveying these unfortunate persons is one that stands in need of thorough revision. If any class deserve to be protected and assisted by the Government, it is that class who are banished from their native land in search of the bare means of subsistence. All that could be done for these poor people by the great compassion and humanity of the captain and officers was done, but they require much more. The law is bound, at least upon the English side, to see that too many of them are not put on board one ship: and that their accommodations are decent: not demoralising and profligate. It is bound, too, in common humanity, to declare that no man shall be taken on board without his stock of provisions being previously inspected by some proper officer, and pronounced moderately sufficient for his support upon the voyage. It is bound to provide, or to require that there be provided, a medical attendant; whereas in these ships there are none, though sickness of adults, and deaths of children, on the passage, are matters of the very commonest occurrence. Above all, it is the duty of any Government, be it monarchy or republic, to interpose and put an end to that system by which a firm of traders in emigrants purchase of the owners the whole 'tween-decks of a ship, and send on board as many wretched people as they can lay hold of, on any terms they can get, without the smallest reference to the conveniences of the steerage, the number of berths, the slightest separation of the sexes, or anything but their own immediate profit. Nor is even this the worst of the vicious system: for, certain crimping agents of these houses, who have a per-centage on all the passengers they inveigle, are constantly travelling about those districts where poverty and discontent are rife, and tempting the credulous into more misery, by holding out monstrous inducements to emigration which can never be realised.

The history of every family we had on board was pretty much the same. After hoarding up, and borrowing, and begging, and selling everything to pay the passage, they had gone out to New York, expecting to find its streets paved with gold; and had found them paved with very hard and very real stones. Enterprise was dull; labourers were not wanted; jobs of work were to be got, but the payment was not. They were coming back, even poorer than they went. One

of them was carrying an open letter from a young English artisan, who had been in New York a fortnight, to a friend near Manchester, whom he strongly urged to follow him. One of the officers brought it to me as a curiosity. "This is the country, Jem," said the writer. "I like America. There is no despotism here; that's the great thing. Employment of all sorts is going a begging, and wages are capital. You have only to choose a trade, Jem, and be it. I haven't made choice of one yet, but I shall soon. *At present, I haven't quite made up my mind whether to be a carpenter or a tailor.*"

There was yet another kind of passenger, and but one more, who, in the calm and the light winds, was a constant theme of conversation and observation among us. This was an English sailor, a smart, thorough-built, English man-of-war's man from his hat to his shoes, who was serving in the American navy, and, having got leave of absence, was on his way home to see his friends. When he presented himself to take and pay for his passage, it had been suggested to him that, being an able seaman, he might as well work it and save the money, but this piece of advice he very indignantly rejected: saying, "He'd be damned but for once he'd go aboard ship as a gentleman." Accordingly, they took his money, but he no sooner came aboard than he stowed his kit in the forecastle, arranged to mess with the crew, and, the very first time the hands were turned up, went aloft like a cat, before anybody. And all through the passage there he was, first at the braces, outermost on the yards, perpetually lending a hand everywhere, but always with a sober dignity in his manner, and a sober grin on his face, which plainly said, "I do it as a gentleman. For my own pleasure, mind you!"

At length and at last, the promised wind came up in right good earnest, and away we went before it, with every stitch of canvas set, slashing through the water nobly. There was a grandeur in the motion of the splendid ship, as, overshadowed by her mass of sails, she rode at a furious pace upon the waves, which filled one with an indescribable sense of pride and exultation. As she plunged into a foaming valley, how I loved to see the green waves, bordered deep with white, come rushing on astern, to buoy her upward at their pleasure, and curl about her as she stooped again, but always own her for their haughty mistress still! On, on we flew, with changing lights upon the water, being now in the blessed region of fleecy skies; a bright sun lighting us by day, and a bright moon by night; the vane pointing directly homeward, alike the truthful index to the favouring wind and to our cheerful hearts; until at sunrise, one fair Monday morning—the twenty-seventh of June, I shall not easily forget the day—there lay before us old Cape Clear, God bless it, showing, in the mist of early morning, like a cloud: the brightest and most welcome cloud, to us, that ever hid the face of Heaven's fallen sister—Home.

Dim speck as it was in the wide prospect, it made the sunrise a more cheerful sight, and gave to it that sort of human interest which it seems to want at sea. There, as elsewhere, the return of day is inseparable from some sense of renewed hope and gladness; but the light shining on the dreary waste of water, and showing it in all its vast extent of loneliness, presents a solemn spectacle, which even night, veiling it in darkness and uncertainty, does not surpass. The rising of the moon is more in keeping with the solitary ocean; and has an air of melancholy grandeur, which, in its soft and gentle influence, seems to comfort while it saddens. I recollect, when I was a very young child, having a fancy that the reflection of the moon in water was a path to Heaven, trodden by the spirits of good people on their way to God; and this old feeling often came over me again, when I watched it on a tranquil night at sea.

The wind was very light on this same Monday morning, but it was still in the right quarter, and so, by slow degrees, we left Cape Clear behind, and sailed along within sight of the coast of Ireland. And how merry we all were, and how loyal to the George Washington, and how full of mutual congratulations, and how venturesome in predicting the exact hour at which we should arrive at Liverpool, may be easily imagined and readily understood. Also, how heartily we drank the captain's health that day at dinner; and how restless we became about packing up; and how two or three of the most sanguine spirits rejected the idea of going to bed at all that night as something it was not worth while to do, so near the shore, but went nevertheless, and slept soundly; and how to be so near our journey's end was like a pleasant dream, from which one feared to wake.

The friendly breeze freshened again next day, and on we went once more before it gallantly: descrying now and then an English ship going homeward under shortened sail, while we, with every inch of canvas crowded on, dashed gaily past, and left her far behind. Towards evening the weather turned hazy, with a drizzling rain; and soon became so thick, that we sailed, as it were, in a cloud. Still we swept onward like a

phantom ship, and many an eager eye glanced up to where the Look-out on the mast kept watch for Holyhead.

At length his long-expected cry was heard, and at the same moment there shone out from the haze and mist ahead a gleaming light, which presently was gone, and soon returned, and soon was gone again. Whenever it came back, the eyes of all on board brightened and sparkled like itself: and there we all stood, watching this revolving light upon the rock at Holyhead, and praising it for its brightness and its friendly warning, and lauding it, in short, above all other signal lights that ever were displayed, until it once more glimmered faintly in the distance, far behind us.

Then, it was time to fire a gun for a pilot; and, almost before its smoke had cleared away, a little boat with a light at her masthead came bearing down upon us, through the darkness, swiftly. And presently, our sails being backed, she ran alongside; and the hoarse pilot, wrapped and muffled in pea-coats and shawls to the very bridge of his weather-ploughed-up nose, stood bodily among us on the deck. And I think, if that pilot had wanted to borrow fifty pounds for an indefinite period on no security, we should have engaged to lend it him, among us, before his boat had dropped astern, or (which is the same thing) before every scrap of news in the paper he brought with him had become the common property of all on board.

We turned in pretty late that night, and turned out pretty early next morning. By six o'clock we clustered on the deck, prepared to go ashore; and looked upon the spires and roofs, and smoke, of Liverpool. By eight we all sat down in one of its hotels, to eat and drink together for the last time. And by nine we had shaken hands all round, and broken up our social company for ever.

The country, by the railroad, seemed, as we rattled through it, like a luxuriant garden. The beauty of the fields (so small they looked!), the hedgerows, and the trees; the pretty cottages, the beds of flowers, the old churchyards, the antique houses, and every well-known object; the exquisite delights of that one journey crowding, in the short compass of a summer's day, the joy of many years, and winding up with Home, and all that makes it dear: no tongue can tell, or pen of mine describe.

CHAPTER XVII.

SLAVERY.

THE upholders of slavery in America —of the atrocities of which system I shall not write one word for which I have not ample proof and warrant —may be divided into three great classes.

The first are those more moderate and rational owners of human cattle who have come into the possession of them as so many coins in their trading capital, but who admit the frightful nature of the Institution in the abstract, and perceive the dangers to society with which it is fraught: dangers which, however distant they may be, or howsoever tardy in their coming on, are as certain to fall upon its guilty head as is the Day of Judgment.

The second consists of all those owners, breeders, users, buyers, and sellers of slaves, who will, until the bloody chapter has a bloody end, own, breed, use, buy, and sell them at all hazards; who doggedly deny the horrors of the system, in the teeth of such a mass of evidence as never was brought to bear on any other subject, and to which the experience of every day contributes its immense amount; who would, at this or any other moment, gladly involve America in a war, civil or foreign, provided that it had for its sole end and object the assertion of their right to perpetuate slavery, and to whip and work and torture slaves, unquestioned by any human authority, and unassailed by any human power; who, when they speak of Freedom, mean the Freedom to oppress their kind, and to be savage, merciless, and cruel; and of whom every man on his own ground, in Republican America, is a more exacting, and a sterner, and a less responsible despot than the Caliph Haroun Alraschid in his angry robe of scarlet.

The third, and not the least numerous or influential, is composed of all that delicate gentility which cannot bear a superior, and cannot brook an equal; of that class whose Republicanism means, "I will not tolerate a man above me: and, of those below, none must approach too near;" whose pride, in a land where voluntary servitude is shunned as a disgrace, must be ministered to by slaves; and whose inalienable rights can only have their growth in negro wrongs.

It has been sometimes urged that, in the unavailing efforts which have been made to advance the cause of Human Freedom in the republic of America (strange cause for history

to treat of!), sufficient regard has not been had to the existence of the first class of persons; and it has been contended that they are hardly used, in being confounded with the second. This is, no doubt, the case; noble instances of pecuniary and personal sacrifice have already had their growth among them; and it is much to be regretted that the gulf between them and the advocates of emancipation should have been widened and deepened by any means: the rather as there are, beyond dispute, among these slave-owners, many kind masters who are tender in the exercise of their unnatural power. Still it is to be feared that this injustice is inseparable from the state of things with which humanity and truth are called upon to deal. Slavery is not a whit the more endurable because some hearts are to be found which can partially resist its hardening influences; nor can the indignant tide of honest wrath stand still, because in its onward course it overwhelms a few who are comparatively innocent among a host of guilty.

The ground most commonly taken by these better men among the advocates of slavery is this: "It is a bad system; and for myself I would willingly get rid of it, if I could; most willingly. But it is not so bad as you in England take it to be. You are deceived by the representations of the emancipationists. The greater part of my slaves are much attached to me. You will say that I do not allow them to be severely treated; but I will put it to you whether you believe that it can be a general practice to treat them inhumanly, when it would impair their value, and would be obviously against the interests of their masters."

Is it the interest of any man to steal, to game, to waste his health and mental faculties by drunkenness, to lie, forswear himself, indulge hatred, seek desperate revenge, or do murder? No. All these are roads to ruin. And why, then, do men tread them? Because such inclinations are among the vicious qualities of mankind. Blot out, ye friends of slavery, from the catalogue of human passions, brutal lust, cruelty, and the abuse of irresponsible power (of all earthly temptations the most difficult to be resisted), and when ye have done so, and not before, we will inquire whether it be the interest of a master to lash and maim the slaves, over whose lives and limbs he has an absolute control!

But again: this class, together with that last one I have named, the miserable aristocracy spawned of a false republic, lift up their voices and exclaim, "Public opinion is all-sufficient to prevent such cruelty as you denounce." Public opinion! Why, public opinion in the slave States *is* slavery, is it not? Public opinion in the slave States has delivered the slaves over to the gentle mercies of their masters. Public opinion has made the laws, and denied the slaves legislative protection. Public opinion has knotted the lash, heated the branding-iron, loaded the rifle, and shielded the murderer. Public opinion threatens the abolitionist with death, if he venture to the South; and drags him with a rope about his middle, in broad unblushing noon, through the first city in the East. Public opinion has, within a few years, burned a slave alive at a slow fire in the city of St. Louis; and public opinion has to this day maintained upon the bench that estimable Judge who charged the Jury, impanelled there to try his murderers, that their most horrid deed was an act of public opinion, and, being so, must not be punished by the laws the public sentiment had made. Public opinion hailed this doctrine with a howl of wild applause, and set the prisoners free, to walk the city, men of mark, and influence, and station, as they had been before.

Public opinion! what class of men have an immense preponderance over the rest of the community in their power of representing public opinion in the legislature? The slave-owners. They send from their twelve States one hundred members, while the fourteen free States, with a free population nearly double, return but a hundred and forty-two. Before whom do the presidential candidates bow down the most humbly, on whom do they fawn the most fondly, and for whose tastes do they cater the most assiduously in their servile protestations? The slave-owners always.

Public opinion! hear the public opinion of the free South as expressed by its own members in the House of Representatives at Washington. "I have a great respect for the chair," quoth North Carolina, "I have a great respect for the chair as an officer of the House, and a great respect for him personally; nothing but that respect prevents me from rushing to the table, and tearing that petition which has just been presented for the abolition of slavery in the district of Columbia to pieces."—"I warn the abolitionists," says South Carolina, "ignorant, infuriated barbarians as they are, that if chance shall throw any of them into our hands, he may expect a felon's death."—"Let an abolitionist come within the borders of South Carolina," cries a third; mild Carolina's colleague; "and if we can catch him, we will try him, and, notwithstanding the interference of

all the governments on earth, including the Federal Government, we will HANG him."

Public opinion has made this law.—It has declared that in Washington, in that city which takes its name from the father of American liberty, any justice of the peace may bind with fetters any negro passing down the street, and thrust him into gaol: no offence on the black man's part is necessary. The justice says, "I choose to think this man a runaway:" and locks him up. Public opinion empowers the man of law, when this is done, to advertise the negro in the newspapers, warning his owner to come and claim him, or he will be sold to pay the gaol fees. But supposing he is a free black, and has no owner, it may naturally be presumed that he is set at liberty. NO: HE IS SOLD TO RECOMPENSE HIS GAOLER. This has been done again, and again, and again. He has no means of proving his freedom; has no adviser, messenger, or assistance of any sort or kind; no investigation into his case is made, or inquiry instituted. He, a free man, who may have served for years, and bought his liberty, is thrown into gaol on no process, for no crime, and on no pretence of crime: and is sold to pay the gaol fees. This seems incredible, even of America, but it is the law.

Public opinion is deferred to in such cases as the following; which is headed in the newspapers—

"*Interesting Law-case.*

"An interesting case is now on trial in the Supreme Court, arising out of the following facts. A gentleman residing in Maryland had allowed an aged pair of his slaves substantial though not legal freedom for several years. While thus living, a daughter was born to them, who grew up in the same liberty, until she married a free negro, and went with him to reside in Pennsylvania. They had several children, and lived unmolested until the original owner died, when his heir attempted to regain them; but the magistrate before whom they were brought decided that he had no jurisdiction in the case. *The owner seized the woman and her children in the night, and carried them to Maryland.*"

"Cash for negroes," "cash for negroes," "cash for negroes," is the heading of advertisements in great capitals down the long columns of the crowded journals. Woodcuts of a runaway negro with manacled hands, crouching beneath a bluff pursuer in top-boots, who, having caught him, grasps him by the throat, agreeably diversify the pleasant text. The leading article protests against "that abominable and hellish doctrine of abolition, which is repugnant alike to every law of God and nature." The delicate mamma, who smiles her acquiescence in this sprightly writing as she reads the paper in her cool piazza, quiets her youngest child who clings about her skirts by promising the boy "a whip to beat the little niggers with."—But the negroes, little and big, are protected by public opinion.

Let us try this public opinion by another test, which is important in three points of view: first, as showing how desperately timid of the public opinion slave-owners are in their delicate descriptions of fugitive slaves in widely-circulated newspapers; secondly, as showing how perfectly contented the slaves are, and how very seldom they run away; thirdly, as exhibiting their entire freedom from scar, or blemish, or any mark of cruel infliction, as their pictures are drawn, not by lying abolitionists, but by their own truthful masters.

The following are a few specimens of the advertisements in the public papers. It is only four years since the oldest among them appeared; and others of the same nature continue to be published every day in shoals.

"Ran away, Negress Caroline. Had on a collar, with one prong turned down."

"Ran away, a black woman, Betsy. Had an iron bar on her right leg."

"Ran away, the negro Manuel. Much marked with irons."

"Ran away, the negress Fanny. Had on an iron band about her neck."

"Ran away, a negro boy about twelve years old. Had round his neck a chain dog-collar with 'De Lampert' engraved on it."

"Ran away, the negro Hown. Has a ring of iron on his left foot. Also, Grise, *his wife*, having a ring and chain on the left leg."

"Ran away, a negro boy named James. Said boy was ironed when he left me."

"Committed to jail, a man who calls his name John. He has a clog of iron on his right foot which will weigh four or five pounds."

"Detained at the police jail, the negro wench, Myra. Has several marks of LASHING, and has irons on her feet."

"Ran away, a negro woman and two children. A few days before she went off, I burnt her with a hot iron, on the left side of her face. I tried to make the letter M."

"Ran away, a negro man named Henry; his left eye out, some scars from a dirk on and under his left arm, and much scarred with the whip."

"One hundred dollars reward, for a negro fellow, Pompey, 40 years old. He is branded on the left jaw."

"Committed to jail, a negro man. Has no toes on the left foot."

"Ran away, a negro woman named Rachel. Has lost all her toes except the large one."

"Ran away, Sam. He was shot a short time since through the hand, and has several shots in his left arm and side."

"Ran away, my negro man Dennis. Said negro has been shot in the left arm between the shoulders and elbow, which has paralysed the left hand."

"Ran away, my negro man named Simon. He has been shot badly, in his back and right arm."

"Ran away, a negro named Arthur. Has a considerable scar across his breast and each arm, made by a knife; loves to talk much of the goodness of God."

"Twenty-five dollars reward for my man Isaac. He has a scar on his forehead, caused by a blow; and one on his back, made by a shot from a pistol."

"Ran away, a negro girl called Mary. Has a small scar over her eye, a good many teeth missing, the letter A is branded on her cheek and forehead."

"Ran away, negro Ben. Has a scar on his right hand; his thumb and forefinger being injured by being shot last fall. A part of the bone came out. He has also one or two large scars on his back and hips."

"Detained at the jail, a mulatto, named Tom. Has a scar on the right cheek, and appears to have been burned with powder on the face."

"Ran away, a negro man named Ned. Three of his fingers are drawn into the palm of his hand by a cut. Has a scar on the back of his neck, nearly half round, done by a knife."

"Was committed to jail, a negro man. Says his name is Josiah. His back very much scarred by the whip; and branded on the thigh and hips in three or four places, thus (J.M). The rim of his right ear has been bit or cut off."

"Fifty dollars reward, for my fellow Edward. He has a scar on the corner of his mouth, two cuts on and under his arm, and the letter E on his arm."

"Ran away, negro boy Ellie. Has a scar on one of his arms from the bite of a dog."

"Ran away, from the plantation of James Surgette, the following negroes: Randal, has one ear cropped; Bob, has lost one eye; Kentucky Tom, has one jaw broken."

"Ran away, Anthony. One of his ears cut off, and his left hand cut with an axe."

"Fifty dollars reward for the negro Jim Blake. Has a piece cut out of each ear, and the middle finger of the left hand cut off to the second joint."

"Ran away, a negro woman named Maria. Has a scar on one side of her cheek, by a cut. Some scars on her back."

"Ran away, the Mulatto wench Mary. Has a cut on the left arm, a scar on the left shoulder, and two upper teeth missing."

I should say, perhaps, in explanation of this latter piece of description, that, among the other blessings which public opinion secures to the negroes, is the common practice of violently punching out their teeth. To make them wear iron collars by day and night, and to worry them with dogs, are practices almost too ordinary to deserve mention.

"Ran away, my man Fountain. Has holes in his ears, a scar on the right side of his forehead, has been shot in the hind parts of his legs, and is marked on the back with the whip."

"Two hundred and fifty dollars reward for my negro man Jim. He is much marked with shot in his right thigh. The shot entered on the outside, halfway between the hip and knee joints."

"Brought to jail, John. Left ear cropt."

"Taken up, a negro man. Is very much scarred about the face and body, and has the left ear bit off."

"Ran away, a black girl named Mary. Has a scar on her cheek, and the end of one of her toes cut off."

"Ran away, my mulatto woman, Judy. She has had her right arm broke."

"Ran away, my negro man, Levi. His left hand has been burnt, and I think the end of his forefinger is off."

"Ran away, a negro man, NAMED WASHINGTON. Has lost a part of his middle finger, and the end of his little finger."

"Twenty-five dollars reward for my man John. The tip of his nose is bit off."

"Twenty-five dollars reward for the negro slave Sally. Walks *as though* crippled in the back."

"Ran away, Joe Dennis. Has a small notch in one of his ears."

"Ran away, negro boy, Jack. Has a small crop out of his left ear."

"Ran away, a negro man, named Ivory. Has a small piece cut out of the top of each ear."

While upon the subject of ears, I may observe that a distinguished abolitionist in New York once received a negro's ear, which had been cut

off close to the head, in a general post letter. It was forwarded by the free and independent gentleman who had caused it to be amputated, with a polite request that he would place the specimen in his "collection."

I could enlarge this catalogue with broken arms, and broken legs, and gashed flesh, and missing teeth, and lacerated backs, and bites of dogs, and brands of red-hot irons innumerable: but, as my readers will be sufficiently sickened and repelled already, I will turn to another branch of the subject.

These advertisements, of which a similar collection might be made for every year, and month, and week, and day; and which are coolly read in families as things of course, and as a part of the current news and small-talk; will serve to show how very much the slaves profit by public opinion, and how tender it is in their behalf. But it may be worth while to inquire how the slave-owners, and the class of society to which great numbers of them belong, defer to public opinion in their conduct, not to their slaves, but to each other; how they are accustomed to restrain their passions; what their bearing is among themselves; whether they are fierce or gentle, whether their social customs be brutal, sanguinary, and violent, or bear the impress of civilisation and refinement.

That we may have no partial evidence from abolitionists in this inquiry either, I will once more turn to their own newspapers, and I will confine myself, this time, to a selection from paragraphs which appeared from day to day during my visit to America, and which refer to occurrences happening while I was there. The italics in these extracts, as in the foregoing, are my own.

These cases did not ALL occur, it will be seen, in territory actually belonging to legalised Slave States, though most, and those the very worst among them, did, as their counterparts constantly do; but the position of the scenes of action in reference to places immediately at hand, where slavery is the law; and the strong resemblance between that class of outrages and the rest; lead to the just presumption that the character of the parties concerned was formed in slave districts, and brutalised by slave customs.

"*Horrible Tragedy.*

"By a slip from *The Southport Telegraph*, Wisconsin, we learn that the Hon. Charles C. P. Arndt, Member of the Council for Brown county, was shot dead *on the floor of the Council chamber*, by James R. Vinyard, Member from Grant county. *The affair* grew out of a nomination for Sheriff of Grant county. Mr. E. S. Baker was nominated and supported by Mr. Arndt. This nomination was opposed by Vinyard, who wanted the appointment to vest in his own brother. In the course of the debate, the deceased made some statements which Vinyard pronounced false, and made use of violent and insulting language, dealing largely in personalities, to which Mr. A. made no reply. After the adjournment, Mr. A. stepped up to Vinyard, and requested him to retract, which he refused to do, repeating the offensive words. Mr. Arndt then made a blow at Vinyard, who drew back a pace, drew a pistol, and shot him dead.

"The issue appears to have been provoked on the part of Vinyard, who was determined at all hazards to defeat the appointment of Baker, and who, himself defeated, turned his ire and revenge upon the unfortunate Arndt."

"*The Wisconsin Tragedy.*

"Public indignation runs high in the territory of Wisconsin, in relation to the murder of C. C. P. Arndt, in the Legislative Hall of the Territory. Meetings have been held in different counties of Wisconsin, denouncing *the practice of secretly bearing arms in the Legislative chambers of the country*. We have seen the account of the expulsion of James R. Vinyard, the perpetrator of the bloody deed, and are amazed to hear, that, after this expulsion by those who saw Vinyard kill Mr. Arndt in the presence of his aged father, who was on a visit to see his son, little dreaming that he was to witness his murder, *Judge Dunn has discharged Vinyard on bail.* The Miners' Free Press speaks *in terms of merited rebuke* at the outrage upon the feelings of the people of Wisconsin. Vinyard was within arm's length of Mr. Arndt, when he took such deadly aim at him, that he never spoke. Vinyard might at pleasure, being so near, have only wounded him, but he chose to kill him."

"*Murder.*

"By a letter in a St. Louis paper of the 14th, we notice a terrible outrage at Burlington, Iowa. A Mr. Bridgman having had a difficulty with a citizen of the place, Mr. Ross; a brother-in-law of the latter provided himself with one of Colt's revolving pistols, met Mr. B. in the street, *and discharged the contents of five of the barrels at him: each shot taking effect.* Mr. B., though horribly wounded, and dying, returned the fire, and killed Ross on the spot."

"*Terrible death of Robert Potter.*

"From the 'Caddo Gazette,' of the 12th inst., we learn the frightful death of Colonel Robert Potter. . . . . He was beset in his house by an enemy, named Rose. He sprang from his couch, seized his gun, and, in his night clothes, rushed from the house. For about two hundred yards his speed seemed to defy his pursuers; but, getting entangled in a thicket, he was captured. Rose told him *that he intended to act a generous part*, and give him a chance for his life. He then told Potter he might run, and he should not be interrupted till he reached a certain distance. Potter started at the word of command, and before a gun was fired he had reached the lake. His first impulse was to jump into the water and dive for it, which he did. Rose was close behind him, and formed his men on the bank ready to shoot him as he rose. In a few seconds he came up to breathe; and scarce had his head reached the surface of the water when it was completely riddled with the shot of their guns, and he sunk, to rise no more!"

"*Murder in Arkansas.*

"We understand *that a severe rencontre came off* a few days since in the Seneca Nation, between Mr. Loose, the sub-agent of the mixed band of the Senecas, Quapaw, and Shawnees, and Mr. James Gillespie, of the mercantile firm of Thomas G. Allison and Co., of Maysville, Benton, County Ark, in which the latter was slain with a bowie-knife. Some difficulty had for some time existed between the parties. It is said that Major Gillespie brought on the attack with a cane. A severe conflict ensued, during which two pistols were fired by Gillespie and one by Loose. Loose then stabbed Gillespie with one of those never-failing weapons, a bowie-knife. The death of Major G. is much regretted, as he was a liberal-minded and energetic man. Since the above was in type, we have learned that Major Allison has stated to some of our citizens in town that Mr. Loose gave the first blow. We forbear to give any particulars, as *the matter will be the subject of judicial investigation*."

"*Foul Deed.*

"The steamer Thames, just from Missouri river, brought us a handbill, offering a reward of 500 dollars, for the person who assassinated Lilburn W. Baggs, late Governor of this State, at Independence, on the night of the 6th inst. Governor Baggs, it is stated in a written memorandum, was not dead, but mortally wounded.

"Since the above was written, we received a note from the clerk of the Thames, giving the following particulars. Gov. Baggs was shot by some villain on Friday, 6th inst., in the evening, while sitting in a room in his own house in Independence. His son, a boy, hearing a report, ran into the room, and found the Governor sitting in his chair, with his jaw fallen down, and his head leaning back: on discovering the injury done to his father, he gave the alarm. Foot tracks were found in the garden below the window, and a pistol picked up supposed to have been overloaded, and thrown from the hand of the scoundrel who fired it. Three buck shots of a heavy load took effect; one going through his mouth, one into the brain, and another probably in or near the brain; all going into the back part of the neck and head. The Governor was still alive on the morning of the 7th; but no hopes for his recovery by his friends, and but slight hopes from his physicians.

"A man was suspected, and the Sheriff most probably has possession of him by this time.

"The pistol was one of a pair stolen some days previous from a baker in Independence, and the legal authorities have the description of the other."

"*Rencontre.*

"An unfortunate *affair* took place on Friday evening in Chartres Street, in which one of our most respectable citizens received a dangerous wound, from a poignard, in the abdomen. From the Bee (New Orleans) of yesterday, we learn the following particulars. It appears that an article was published in the French side of the paper on Monday last, containing some strictures on the Artillery Battalion for firing their guns on Sunday morning, in answer to those from the Ontario and Woodbury, and thereby much alarm was caused to the families of those persons who were out all night preserving the peace of the city. Major C. Gally, Commander of the battalion, resenting this, called at the office and demanded the author's name; that of Mr. P. Arpin was given to him, who was absent at the time. Some angry words then passed with one of the proprietors, and a challenge followed; the friends of both parties tried to arrange the affair, but failed to do so. On Friday evening, about seven o'clock, Major Gally met Mr. P. Arpin in Chartres Street, and accosted him. 'Are you Mr. Arpin?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Then I have to tell you that you are a——" (applying an appropriate epithet).

"'I shall remind you of your words, sir.'

"'But I have said I would break my cane on your shoulders.'

"'I know it, but I have not yet received the blow.'

"At these words, Major Gally, having a cane in his hands, struck Mr. Arpin across the face, and the latter drew a poignard from his pocket and stabbed Major Gally in the abdomen.

"Fears are entertained that the wound will be mortal. *We understand that Mr. Arpin has given security for his appearance at the Criminal Court to answer the charge.*"

"*Affray in Mississippi.*

"On the 27th ult., in an affray near Carthage, Leake county, Mississippi, between James Cottingham and John Wilburn, the latter was shot by the former, and so horribly wounded, that there was no hope of his recovery. On the 2nd instant, there was an affray at Carthage between A. C. Sharkey and George Goff, in which the latter was shot, and thought mortally wounded. Sharkey delivered himself up to the authorities, *but changed his mind and escaped!*"

"*Personal Encounter.*

"An encounter took place in Sparta, a few days since, between the barkeeper of an hotel, and a man named Bury. It appears that Bury had become somewhat noisy, *and that the barkeeper, determined to preserve order, had threatened to shoot Bury*, whereupon Bury drew a pistol and shot the barkeeper down. He was not dead at the last accounts, but slight hopes were entertained of his recovery."

"*Duel.*

"The clerk of the steamboat *Tribune* informs us that another duel was fought on Tuesday last, by Mr. Robbins, a bank officer in Vicksburg, and Mr. Fall, the editor of the Vicksburg Sentinel. According to the arrangement, the parties had six pistols each, which, after the word 'Fire!' *they were to discharge as fast as they pleased.* Fall fired two pistols without effect. Mr. Robbins' first shot took effect in Fall's thigh, who fell, and was unable to continue the combat."

"*Affray in Clarke County.*

"An *unfortunate affray* occurred in Clarke county (Mo.) near Waterloo, on Tuesday the 19th ult., which originated in settling the partnership concerns of Messrs. M'Kane and M'Allister, who had been engaged in the business of distilling, and resulted in the death of the latter, who was shot down by Mr. M'Kane, because of his attempting to take possession of seven barrels of whiskey, the property of M'Kane, which had been knocked off to M'Allister at a sheriff's sale at one dollar per barrel. M'Kane immediately fled, *and at the latest dates had not been taken.*

"*This unfortunate affray* caused considerable excitement in the neighbourhood, as both the parties were men with large families depending upon them and stood well in the community."

I will quote but one more paragraph, which, by reason of its monstrous absurdity, may be a relief to these atrocious deeds.

"*Affair of Honour.*

"We have just heard the particulars of a meeting which took place on Six Mile Island, on Tuesday, between two young bloods of our city: Samuel Thurston, *aged fifteen*, and William Hine, *aged thirteen years.* They were attended by young gentlemen of the same age. The weapons used on the occasion were a couple of Dickson's best rifles; the distance, thirty yards. They took one fire, without any damage being sustained by either party, except the ball of Thurston's gun passing through the crown of Hine's hat. *Through the intercession of the Board of Honour*, the challenge was withdrawn, and the difference amicably adjusted."

If the reader will picture to himself the kind of Board of Honour which amicably adjusted the difference between these two little boys, who in any other part of the world would have been amicably adjusted on two porters' backs, and soundly flogged with birchen rods, he will be possessed, no doubt, with as strong a sense of its ludicrous character as that which sets me laughing whenever its image rises up before me.

Now, I appeal to every human mind imbued with the commonest of common sense, and the commonest of common humanity; to all dispassionate, reasoning creatures, of any shade of opinion; and ask, with these revolting evidences of the state of society which exists in and about the slave districts of America before them, can they have a doubt of the real condition of the slave, or can they for a moment make a compromise between the institution or any of its flagrant fearful features, and their own just consciences? Will they say of any tale of cruelty and horror, however aggravated in de-

gree, that it is improbable, when they can turn to the public prints, and, running, read such signs as these, laid before them by the men who rule the slaves: in their own acts, and under their own hands?

Do we not know that the worst deformity and ugliness of slavery are at once the cause and the effect of the reckless licence taken by these free-born outlaws? Do we not know that the man who has been born and bred among its wrongs; who has seen in his childhood husbands obliged, at the word of command, to flog their wives; women, indecently compelled to hold up their own garments that men might lay the heavier stripes upon their legs, driven and harried by brutal overseers in their time of travail, and becoming mothers on the field of toil, under the very lash itself; who has read in youth, and seen his virgin sisters read, descriptions of runaway men and women, and their disfigured persons, which could not be published elsewhere of so much stock upon a farm, or at a show of beasts:—do we not know that that man, whenever his wrath is kindled up, will be a brutal savage? Do we not know that as he is a coward in his domestic life, stalking among his shrinking men and women slaves armed with his heavy whip, so he will be a coward out of doors, and, carrying cowards' weapons hidden in his breast, will shoot men down and stab them when he quarrels? And if our reason did not teach us this and much beyond; if we were such idiots as to close our eyes to that fine mode of training which rears up such men; should we not know that they who among their equals stab and pistol in the legislative halls, and in the counting-house, and on the market-place, and in all the elsewhere peaceful pursuits of life, must be to their dependants, even though they were free servants, so many merciless and unrelenting tyrants?

What! shall we declaim against the ignorant peasantry of Ireland, and mince the matter when these American taskmasters are in question? Shall we cry shame on the brutality of those who ham-string cattle: and spare the lights of Freedom upon earth who notch the ears of men and women, cut pleasant posies in the shrinking flesh, learn to write with pens of red-hot iron on the human face, rack their poetic fancies for liveries of mutilation which their slaves shall wear for life and carry to the grave, break living limbs as did the soldiery who mocked and slew the Saviour of the world, and set defenceless creatures up for targets? Shall we whimper over legends of the tortures practised on each other by the Pagan Indians, and smile upon the cruelties of Christian men? Shall we, so long as these things last, exult above the scattered remnants of that stately race, and triumph in the white enjoyment of their broad possessions? Rather, for me, restore the forest and the Indian village; in lieu of stars and stripes, let some poor feather flutter in the breeze; replace the streets and squares by wigwams; and though the death-song of a hundred haughty warriors fill the air, it will be music to the shriek of one unhappy slave.

On one theme, which is commonly before our eyes, and in respect of which our national character is changing fast, let the plain Truth be spoken, and let us not, like dastards, beat about the bush by hinting at the Spaniard and the fierce Italian. When knives are drawn by Englishmen in conflict, let it be said and known: "We owe this change to Republican Slavery. These are the weapons of Freedom. With sharp points and edges such as these, Liberty in America hews and hacks her slaves; or, failing that pursuit, her sons devote them to a better use, and turn them on each other."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

THERE are many passages in this book where I have been at some pains to resist the temptation of troubling my readers with my own deductions and conclusions: preferring that they should judge for themselves, from such premises as I have laid before them. My only object in the outset was, to carry them with me faithfully wheresoever I went: and that task I have discharged.

But I may be pardoned if, on such a theme as the general character of the American people, and the general character of their social system, as presented to a stranger's eyes, I desire to express my own opinions in a few words, before I bring these volumes to a close.

They are, by nature, frank, brave, cordial, hospitable, and affectionate. Cultivation and refinement seem but to enhance their warmth of heart and ardent enthusiasm; and it is the possession of these latter qualities in a most remarkable degree which renders an educated American one of the most endearing and most generous of friends. I never was so won upon as by this class; never yielded up my full confidence and esteem so readily and pleasurably as to them;

never can make again, in half a year, so many friends for whom I seem to entertain the regard of half a life.

These qualities are natural, I implicitly believe, to the whole people. That they are, however, sadly sapped and blighted in their growth among the mass; and that there are influences at work which endanger them still more, and give but little present promise of their healthy restoration, is a truth that ought to be told.

It is an essential part of every national character to pique itself mightily upon its faults, and to deduce tokens of its virtue or its wisdom from their very exaggeration. One great blemish in the popular mind of America, and the prolific parent of an innumerable brood of evils, is Universal Distrust. Yet the American citizen plumes himself upon this spirit, even when he is sufficiently dispassionate to perceive the ruin it works; and will often adduce it, in spite of his own reason, as an instance of the great sagacity and acuteness of the people, and their superior shrewdness and independence.

"You carry," says the stranger, "this jealousy and distrust into every transaction of public life. By repelling worthy men from your legislative assemblies, it has bred up a class of candidates for the suffrage, who, in their every act, disgrace your Institutions and your people's choice. It has rendered you so fickle, and so given to change, that your inconstancy has passed into a proverb; for you no sooner set up an idol firmly than you are sure to pull it down and dash it into fragments: and this because, directly you reward a benefactor, or a public servant, you distrust him, merely because he *is* rewarded; and immediately apply yourselves to find out, either that you have been too bountiful in your acknowledgments, or he remiss in his deserts. Any man who attains a high place among you, from the President downwards, may date his downfall from that moment; for any printed lie that any notorious villain pens, although it militate directly against the character and conduct of a life, appeals at once to your distrust, and is believed. You will strain at a gnat in the way of trustfulness and confidence, however fairly won and well deserved; but you will swallow a whole caravan of camels, if they be laden with unworthy doubts and mean suspicions. Is this well, think you, or likely to elevate the character of the governors or the governed among you?"

The answer is invariably the same: "There's freedom of opinion here, you know. Every man thinks for himself, and we are not to be easily overreached. That's how our people come to be suspicious."

Another prominent feature is the love of "smart" dealing: which gilds over many a swindle and gross breach of trust; many a defalcation, public and private; and enables many a knave to hold his head up with the best, who well deserves a halter: though it has not been without its retributive operation, for this smartness has done more in a few years to impair the public credit, and to cripple the public resources, than dull honesty, however rash, could have effected in a century. The merits of a broken speculation, or a bankruptcy, or of a successful scoundrel, are not gauged by its or his observance of the golden rule, "Do as you would be done by," but are considered with reference to their smartness. I recollect, on both occasions of our passing that ill-fated Cairo on the Mississippi, remarking on the bad effects such gross deceits must have, when they exploded, in generating a want of confidence abroad, and discouraging foreign investment: but I was given to understand that this was a very smart scheme, by which a deal of money had been made: and that its smartest feature was, that they forgot these things abroad in a very short time, and speculated again as freely as ever. The following dialogue I have held a hundred times: "Is it not a very disgraceful circumstance that such a man as So-and-so should be acquiring a large property by the most infamous and odious means, and, notwithstanding all the crimes of which he has been guilty, should be tolerated and abetted by your citizens? He is a public nuisance, is he not?" "Yes, sir." "A convicted liar?" "Yes, sir." "He has been kicked, and cuffed, and caned?" "Yes, sir." "And he is utterly dishonourable, debased, and profligate?" "Yes, sir." "In the name of wonder, then, what is his merit?" "Well, sir, he is a smart man."

In like manner, all kinds of deficient and impolitic usages are referred to the national love of trade; though, oddly enough, it would be a weighty charge against a foreigner that he regarded the Americans as a trading people. The love of trade is assigned as a reason for that comfortless custom, so very prevalent in country towns, of married persons living in hotels, having no fireside of their own, and seldom meeting, from early morning until late at night, but at the hasty public meals. The love of trade is a reason why the literature of America is to remain for ever unprotected: "For we are a trading people, and don't care for poetry:" though we *do*, by the way, profess to be very proud of our poets: while healthful amusements, cheerful means of recreation, and

wholesome fancies must fade before the stern utilitarian joys of trade.

These three characteristics are strongly presented at every turn, full in the stranger's view. But, the foul growth of America has a more tangled root than this; and it strikes its fibres deep in its licentious Press.

Schools may be erected, East, West, North, and South; pupils be taught, and masters reared, by scores upon scores of thousands; colleges may thrive, churches may be crammed, temperance may be diffused, and advancing knowledge in all other forms walk through the land with giant strides: but while the newspaper press of America is in, or near, its present abject state, high moral improvement in that country is hopeless. Year by year, it must and will go back; year by year, the tone of public feeling must sink lower down; year by year, the Congress and the Senate must become of less account before all decent men; and year by year, the memory of the Great Fathers of the Revolution must be outraged more and more, in the bad life of their degenerate child.

Among the herd of journals which are published in the States, there are some, the reader scarcely need be told, of character and credit. From personal intercourse with accomplished gentlemen connected with publications of this class, I have derived both pleasure and profit. But the name of these is Few, and of the others Legion; and the influence of the good is powerless to counteract the mortal poison of the bad.

Among the gentry of America; among the well-informed and moderate; in the learned professions; at the bar and on the bench: there is, as there can be, but one opinion, in reference to the vicious character of these infamous journals. It is sometimes contended—I will not say strangely, for it is natural to seek excuses for such a disgrace—that their influence is not so great as a visitor would suppose. I must be pardoned for saying that there is no warrant for this plea, and that every fact and circumstance tends directly to the opposite conclusion.

When any man, of any grade of desert in intellect or character, can climb to any public distinction, no matter what, in America, without first grovelling down upon the earth, and bending the knee before this monster of depravity; when any private excellence is safe from its attacks; when any social confidence is left unbroken by it, or any tie of social decency and honour is held in the least regard; when any man in that Free Country has freedom of opinion, and presumes to think for himself, and speak for himself, without humble reference to a censorship which, for its rampant ignorance and base dishonesty, he utterly loathes and despises in his heart; when those who most acutely feel its infamy, and the reproach it casts upon the nation, and who most denounce it to each other, dare to set their heels upon, and crush it openly, in the sight of all men: then I will believe that its influence is lessening, and men are returning to their manly senses. But while that Press has its evil eye in every house, and its black hand in every appointment in the state, from a president to a postman; while, with ribald slander for its only stock-in-trade, it is the standard literature of an enormous class, who must find their reading in a newspaper, or they will not read at all; so long must its odium be upon the country's head, and so long must the evil it works be plainly visible in the Republic.

To those who are accustomed to the leading English journals, or to the respectable journals of the Continent of Europe; to those who are accustomed to anything else in print and paper; it would be impossible, without an amount of extract for which I have neither space nor inclination, to convey an adequate idea of this frightful engine in America. But if any man desire confirmation of my statement on this head, let him repair to any place in this city of London, where scattered numbers of these publications are to be found; and there let him form his own opinion.*

It would be well, there can be no doubt, for the American people as a whole, if they loved the Real less, and the Ideal somewhat more. It would be well, if there were greater encouragement to lightness of heart and gaiety, and a wider cultivation of what is beautiful, without being eminently and directly useful. But here I think the general remonstrance, "We are a new country," which is so often advanced as an excuse for defects which are quite unjustifiable, as being of right only the slow growth of an old one, may be very reasonably urged: and I yet hope to hear of there being some other national amusement in the United States, besides newspaper politics.

They certainly are not a humorous people, and their temperament always impressed me as being of a dull and gloomy character. In

* Note to the Original Edition.—Or let him refer to an able and perfectly truthful article in *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, published in the present month of October; to which my attention has been attracted, since these sheets have been passing through the press. He will find some specimens there, by no means remarkable to any man who has been in America, but sufficiently striking to one who has not.

shrewdness of remark, and a certain cast-iron quaintness, the Yankees, or people of New England, unquestionably take the lead; as they do in most other evidences of intelligence. But in travelling about, out of the large cities—as I have remarked in former parts of these volumes—I was quite oppressed by the prevailing seriousness and melancholy air of business: which was so general and unvarying, that, at every new town I came to, I seemed to meet the very same people whom I had left behind me at the last. Such defects as are perceptible in the national manners seem, to me, to be referable, in a great degree, to this cause: which has generated a dull, sullen persistence in coarse usages, and rejected the graces of life as undeserving of attention. There is no doubt that Washington, who was always most scrupulous and exact on points of ceremony, perceived the tendency towards this mistake, even in his time, and did his utmost to correct it.

I cannot hold, with other writers on these subjects, that the prevalence of various forms of Dissent in America is in any way attributable to the non-existence there of an Established Church: indeed, I think the temper of the people, if it admitted of such an Institution being founded amongst them, would lead them to desert it, as a matter of course, merely because it *was* established. But, supposing it to exist, I doubt its probable efficacy in summoning the wandering sheep to one great fold, simply because of the immense amount of Dissent which prevails at home; and because I do not find in America any one form of religion with which we in Europe, or even in England, are unacquainted. Dissenters resort thither in great numbers, as other people do, simply because it is a land of resort; and great settlements of them are founded, because ground can be purchased, and towns and villages reared, where there were none of the human creation before. But even the Shakers emigrated from England; our country is not unknown to Mr. Joseph Smith, the apostle of Mormonism, or to his benighted disciples; I have beheld religious scenes myself, in some of our populous towns, which can hardly be surpassed by an American camp-meeting; and I am not aware that any instance of superstitious imposture on the one hand, and superstitious credulity on the other, has had its origin in the United States, which we cannot more than parallel by the precedents of Mrs. Southcote, Mary Tofts the rabbit-breeder, or even Mr. Thom of Canterbury: which latter case arose some time after the dark ages had passed away.

The Republican Institutions of America undoubtedly lead the people to assert their self-respect and their equality; but a traveller is bound to bear those Institutions in his mind, and not hastily to resent the near approach of a class of strangers who, at home, would keep aloof. This characteristic, when it was tinctured with no foolish pride, and stopped short of no honest service, never offended me; and I very seldom, if ever, experienced its rude or unbecoming display. Once or twice it was comically developed, as in the following case; but this was an amusing incident, and not the rule, or near it.

I wanted a pair of boots at a certain town, for I had none to travel in, but those with the memorable cork soles, which were much too hot for the fiery decks of a steamboat. I therefore sent a message to an artist in boots, importing, with my compliments, that I should be happy to see him, if he would do me the polite favour to call. He very kindly returned for answer, that he would "look round" at six o'clock that evening.

I was lying on the sofa, with a book and a wine-glass, at about that time, when the door opened, and a gentleman in a stiff cravat, within a year or two on either side of thirty, entered, in his hat and gloves; walked up to the looking-glass; arranged his hair; took off his gloves; slowly produced a measure from the uttermost depths of his coat pocket; and requested me, in a languid tone, to "unfix" my straps. I complied, but looked with some curiosity at his hat, which was still upon his head. It might have been that, or it might have been the heat—but he took it off. Then, he sat himself down on a chair opposite to me; rested an arm on each knee; and, leaning forward very much, took from the ground, by a great effort, the specimen of metropolitan workmanship which I had just pulled off: whistling pleasantly as he did so. He turned it over and over; surveyed it with a contempt no language can express; and inquired if I wished him to fix me a boot like *that?* I courteously replied that, provided the boots were large enough, I would leave the rest to him; that, if convenient and practicable, I should not object to their bearing some resemblance to the model then before him; but that I would be entirely guided by, and would beg to leave the whole subject to, his judgment and discretion. "You an't partickler about this scoop in the heel I suppose, then?" says he. "We don't foller that here." I repeated my last observation. He looked at himself in the glass again; went closer to it to dash a grain or two of dust out of the corner of his eye; and settled his cravat. All this time my

leg and foot were in the air. "Nearly ready, sir?" I inquired. "Well, pretty nigh," he said; "keep steady." I kept as steady as I could, both in foot and face; and having by this time got the dust out, and found his pencil-case, he measured me, and made the necessary notes. When he had finished, he fell into his old attitude, and, taking up the boot again, mused for some time. "And this," he said at last, "is an English boot, is it? This is a London boot, eh?" "That, sir," I replied, "is a London boot." He mused over it again, after the manner of Hamlet with Yorick's skull; nodded his head, as who should say, "I pity the Institutions that led to the production of this boot;" rose; put up his pencil, notes, and paper—glancing at himself in the glass all the time—put on his hat; drew on his gloves very slowly; and finally walked out. When he had been gone about a minute, the door reopened, and his hat and his head reappeared. He looked round the room, and at the boot again, which was still lying on the floor; appeared thoughtful for a minute, and then said, "Well, good arternoon." "Good afternoon, sir," said I: and that was the end of the interview.

There is but one other head on which I wish to offer a remark; and that has reference to the public health. In so vast a country, where there are thousands of millions of acres of land yet unsettled and uncleared, and on every rood of which vegetable decomposition is annually taking place; where there are so many great rivers, and such opposite varieties of climate; there cannot fail to be a great amount of sickness at certain seasons. But I may venture to say, after conversing with many members of the medical profession in America, that I am not singular in the opinion that much of the disease which does prevail might be avoided, if a few common precautions were observed. Greater means of personal cleanliness are indispensable to this end; the custom of hastily swallowing large quantities of animal food three times a day, and rushing back to sedentary pursuits after each meal, must be changed; the gentler sex must go more wisely clad, and take more healthful exercise; and in the latter clause the males must be included also. Above all, in public institutions, and throughout the whole of every town and city, the system of ventilation, and drainage, and removal of impurities requires to be thoroughly revised. There is no local Legislature in America which may not study Mr. Chadwick's excellent Report upon the Sanitary Condition of our Labouring Classes with immense advantage.

I HAVE now arrived at the close of this book. I have little reason to believe, from certain warnings I have had since I returned to England, that it will be tenderly or favourably received by the American people; and, as I have written the Truth in relation to the mass of those who form their judgments and express their opinions, it will be seen that I have no desire to court, by any adventitious means, the popular applause.

It is enough for me to know that what I have set down in these pages cannot cost me a single friend on the other side of the Atlantic, who is, in anything, deserving of the name. For the rest, I put my trust, implicitly, in the spirit in which they have been conceived and penned; and I can bide my time.

I have made no reference to my reception, nor have I suffered it to influence me in what I have written; for, in either case, I should have offered but a sorry acknowledgment, compared with that I bear within my breast, towards those partial readers of my former books across the Water, who met me with an open hand, and not with one that closed upon an iron muzzle.

END OF AMERICAN NOTES.

POSTSCRIPT.

AT a Public Dinner given to me on Saturday, the 18th of April, 1868, in the City of New York, by two hundred representatives of the Press of the United States of America, I made the following observations among others:—

"So much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, that I might have been contented

with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here, but on every suitable occasion, whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also, to declare how astounded I have been by the amazing changes I have seen around me on every side, —changes moral, changes physical, changes in the amount of land subdued and peopled, changes in the rise of vast new cities, changes in the growth of older cities almost out of recognition, changes in the graces and amenities of life, changes in the Press, without whose advancement no advancement can take place anywhere. Nor am I, believe me, so arrogant as to suppose that in five-and-twenty years there have been no changes in me, and that I had nothing to learn and no extreme impressions to correct when I was here first. And this brings me to a point on which I have, ever since I landed in the United States last November, observed a strict silence, though sometimes tempted to break it, but in reference to which I will, with your good leave, take you into my confidence now. Even the Press, being human, may be sometimes mistaken or misinformed, and I rather think that I have in one or two rare instances observed its information to be not strictly accurate with reference to myself. Indeed, I have, now and again, been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself, than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence. Thus, the vigour and perseverance with which I have for some months past been collecting materials for, and hammering away at, a new book on America has much astonished me; seeing that all that time my declaration has been perfectly well known to my publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, that no consideration on earth would induce me to write one. But what I have intended, what I have resolved upon (and this is the confidence I seek to place in you) is, on my return to England, in my own person, in my own Journal, to bear, for the behoof of my countrymen, such testimony to the gigantic changes in this country as I have hinted at to-night. Also, to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here, and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live, and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be republished, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour."

I said these words with the greatest earnestness that I could lay upon them, and I repeat them in print here with equal earnestness. So long as this book shall last, I hope that they will form a part of it, and will be fairly read as inseparable from my experiences and impressions of America.

CHARLES DICKENS.

May, 1868.

PICTURES FROM ITALY.

PICTURES FROM ITALY.

THE READER'S PASSPORT.

IF the readers of this volume will be so kind as to take their credentials for the different places which are the subject of its author's reminiscences, from the Author himself, perhaps they may visit them, in fancy, the more agreeably, and with a better understanding of what they are to expect.

Many books have been written upon Italy, affording many means of studying the history of that interesting country, and the innumerable associations entwined about it. I make but little reference to that stock of information; not at all regarding it as a necessary consequence of my having had recourse to the storehouse for my own benefit, that I should reproduce its easily accessible contents before the eyes of my readers.

Neither will there be found, in these pages, any grave examination into the government or misgovernment of any portion of the country. No visitor of that beautiful land can fail to have a strong conviction on the subject; but as I chose when residing there, a Foreigner, to abstain from the discussion of any such questions with any order of Italians, so I would rather not enter on the inquiry now. During my twelve months' occupation of a house at Genoa, I never found that authorities, constitutionally jealous, were distrustful of me; and I should be sorry to give them occasion to regret their free courtesy, either to myself or any of my countrymen.

There is, probably, not a famous Picture or Statue in all Italy, but could be easily buried under a mountain of printed paper devoted to dissertations on it. I do not, therefore, though an earnest admirer of Painting and Sculpture, expatiate at any length on famous Pictures and Statues.

This Book is a series of faint reflections—mere shadows in the water—of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted in a greater or less degree, on which mine had dwelt for years, and which have some interest for all. The greater part of the descriptions were written on the spot, and sent home, from time to time, in private letters. I do not mention the circumstance as an excuse for any defects they may present, for it would be none; but as a guarantee to the Reader that they were at least penned in the fulness of the subject, and with the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness.

If they have ever a fanciful and idle air, perhaps the reader will suppose them written in the shade of a Sunny Day, in the midst of the objects of which they treat, and will like them none the worse for having such influences of the country upon them.

I hope I am not likely to be misunderstood by Professors of the Roman Catholic faith, on account of anything contained in these pages. I have done my best, in one of my former productions, to do justice to them; and I trust, in this, they will do justice to me. When I mention any exhibition that impressed me as absurd or disagreeable, I do not seek to connect it, or recognise it as necessarily connected, with any essentials of their creed. When I treat of the ceremonies of the Holy Week, I merely treat of their effect, and do not challenge the good and learned Dr. Wiseman's interpretation of their meaning. When I hint a dislike of nunneries for young girls who abjure the world before they have ever proved or known it; or doubt the *ex officio* sanctity of all Priests and Friars; I do no more than many conscientious Catholics both abroad and at home.

I have likened these Pictures to shadows in the water, and would fain hope that I have, nowhere, stirred the water so roughly as to mar the shadows. I could never desire to be on better terms with all my friends than now, when distant mountains rise, once more, in my path. For I need not hesitate to avow that, bent on correcting a brief mistake I made, not long ago, in disturbing the old relations between myself and my readers, and departing for a moment from my old pursuits, I am about to resume them, joyfully, in Switzerland: where, during another year of absence, I can at once work out the themes I have now in my mind without interruption: and, while I keep my English audience within speaking distance, extend my knowledge of a noble country, inexpressibly attractive to me.*

This book is made as accessible as possible, because it would be a great pleasure to me if I could hope, through its means, to compare impressions with some among the multitudes who will hereafter visit the scenes described with interest and delight.

And I have only now, in passport wise, to sketch my reader's portrait, which I hope may be thus supposititiously traced for either sex:

Complexion . . .	Fair.
Eyes	Very cheerful.
Nose	Not supercilious.
Mouth	Smiling.
Visage	Beaming.
General Expression	Extremely agreeable.

GOING THROUGH FRANCE.

ON a fine Sunday morning in the Midsummer time and weather of eighteen hundred and forty-four, it was, my good friend, when—don't be alarmed; not when two travellers might have been observed slowly making their way over that picturesque and broken ground by which the first chapter of a Middle-Aged novel is usually attained—but when an English travelling carriage of considerable proportions, fresh from the shady halls of the Pantechnicon near Belgrave Square, London, was observed (by a very small French soldier; for I saw him look at it) to issue from the gate of the Hôtel Meurice, in the Rue Rivoli at Paris.

I am no more bound to explain why the English family travelling by this carriage, inside and out, should be starting for Italy on a Sunday morning, of all good days in the week, than I am to assign a reason for all the little men in France being soldiers, and all the big men postillions: which is the invariable rule. But, they had some sort of reason for what they did, I have no doubt; and their reason for being there at all was, as you know, that they were going to live in fair Genoa for a year; and that the head of the family purposed, in that space of time, to

* This was written in 1846.

stroll about wherever his restless humour carried him.

And it would have been small comfort to me to have explained to the population of Paris generally, that I was that Head and Chief; and not the radiant embodiment of good-humour who sat beside me in the person of a French Courier—best of servants and most beaming of men! Truth to say, he looked a great deal more patriarchal than I, who, in the shadow of his portly presence, dwindled down to no account at all.

There was, of course, very little in the aspect of Paris—as we rattled near the dismal Morgue and over the Pont Neuf—to reproach us for our Sunday travelling. The wine-shops (every second house) were driving a roaring trade; awnings were spreading, and chairs and tables arranging, outside the cafés, preparatory to the eating of ices, and drinking of cool liquids, later in the day; shoe-blacks were busy on the bridges; shops were open; carts and waggons clattered to and fro; the narrow, uphill, funnel-like streets across the River were so many dense perspectives of crowd and bustle, party-coloured nightcaps, tobacco-pipes, blouses, large boots, and shaggy heads of hair; nothing at that hour denoted a day of rest, unless it were the appearance, here and there, of a family pleasure party, crammed into a bulky old lumbering cab; or of some contemplative holiday-maker in the freest and easiest dishabille, leaning out of a low garret window, watching the drying of his newly-polished shoes on the little parapet outside (if a gentleman), or the airing of her stockings in the sun (if a lady), with calm anticipation.

Once clear of the never-to-be-forgotten-or-forgiven pavement which surrounds Paris, the first three days of travelling towards Marseilles are quiet and monotonous enough. To Sens. To Avallon. To Chalons. A sketch of one day's proceedings is a sketch of all three; and here it is.

We have four horses, and one postillion, who has a very long whip, and drives his team something like the Courier of St. Petersburg in the circle at Astley's or Franconi's: only he sits his own horse instead of standing on him. The immense jack-boots worn by these postillions are sometimes a century or two old; and so ludicrously disproportionate to the wearer's foot, that the spur, which is put where his own heel comes, is generally half-way up the leg of the boots. The man often comes out of the stable-yard, with his whip in his hand and his shoes on, and brings out, in both hands, one boot at a time, which he plants on the ground by the side of his horse, with great gravity, until everything is ready. When it is—and, oh Heaven! the noise they make about it!—he gets into the boots, shoes and all, or is hoisted into them by a couple of friends; adjusts the rope harness, embossed by the labours of innumerable pigeons in the stables; makes all the horses kick and plunge; cracks his whip like a madman; shouts "En route—Hi!" and away we go. He is sure to have a contest with his horse before we have gone very far; and then he calls him a Thief, and a Brigand, and a Pig, and what not; and beats him about the head as if he were made of wood.

There is little more than one variety in the appearance of the country for the first two days. From a dreary plain, to an interminable avenue, and from an interminable avenue to a dreary plain again. Plenty of vines there are in the open fields, but of a short low kind, and not trained in festoons, but about straight sticks. Beggars innumerable there are, everywhere; but an extraordinarily scanty population, and fewer children than I ever encountered. I don't believe we saw a hundred children between Paris and Chalons. Queer old towns, drawbridged and walled: with odd little towers at the angles, like grotesque faces, as if the wall had put a mask on, and were staring down into the moat; other strange little towers, in gardens and fields, and down lanes, and in farmyards: all alone, and always round with a peaked roof, and never used for any purpose at all; ruinous buildings of all sorts; sometimes an hôtel de ville, sometimes a guard-house, sometimes a dwelling-house, sometimes a château with a rank garden, prolific in dandelion, and watched over by extinguisher-topped turrets, and blink-eyed little casements; are the standard objects, repeated over and over again. Sometimes we pass a village inn, with a crumbling wall belonging to it, and a perfect town of outhouses: and painted over the gateway, "Stabling for Sixty Horses;" as, indeed, there might be stabling for sixty score, were there any horses to be stabled there, or anybody resting there, or anything stirring about the place but a dangling bush, indicative of the wine inside; which flutters idly in the wind, in lazy keeping with everything else, and certainly is never in a green old age, though always so old as to be dropping to pieces. And all day long, strange little narrow waggons, in strings of six or eight, bringing cheese from Switzerland, and frequently in charge, the whole line, of one man or even boy—and he very often asleep in the foremost cart—come jingling past: the horses drowsily ringing the bells upon their harness,

and looking as if they thought (no doubt they do) their great blue woolly furniture, of immense weight and thickness, with a pair of grotesque horns growing out of the collar, very much too warm for the Midsummer weather.

Then, there is the Diligence, twice or thrice a day; with the dusty outsides in blue frocks, like butchers; and the insides in white nightcaps; and its cabriolet head on the roof, nodding and shaking, like an idiot's head; and its Young-France passengers staring out of window, with beards down to their waists, and blue spectacles awfully shading their warlike eyes, and very big sticks clenched in their National grasp. Also the Malle Poste, with only a couple of passengers, tearing along at a real good dare-devil pace, and out of sight in no time. Steady old Curés come jolting past, now and then, in such ramshackle, rusty, musty, clattering coaches as no Englishman would believe in; and bony women dawdle about in solitary places, holding cows by ropes while they feed, or digging and hoeing, or doing field-work of a more laborious kind, or representing real shepherdesses with their flocks—to obtain an adequate idea of which pursuit and its followers, in any country, it is only necessary to take any pastoral poem, or picture, and imagine to yourself whatever is most exquisitely and widely unlike the descriptions therein contained.

You have been travelling along, stupidly enough, as you generally do, in the last stage of the day; and the ninety-six bells upon the horses—twenty-four apiece—have been ringing sleepily in your ears for half an hour or so; and it has become a very jog-trot, monotonous, tiresome sort of business; and you have been thinking deeply about the dinner you will have at the next stage; when, down at the end of the long avenue of trees through which you are travelling, the first indication of a town appears, in the shape of some straggling cottages: and the carriage begins to rattle and roll over a horribly uneven pavement. As if the equipage were a great firework, and the mere sight of a smoking cottage chimney had lighted it, instantly it begins to crack and splutter, as if the very devil were in it. Crack, crack, crack, crack. Crack-crack-crack. Crick-crack. Crick-crack. Helo! Hola! Vite! Voleur! Brigand! Hi, hi, hi! En r-r-r-r-r-route! Whip, wheels, driver, stones, beggars, children; crack, crack, crack; helo! hola! charité pour l'amour de Dieu! crick-crack-crick-crack; crick, crick, crick; bump, jolt, crack, bump, crick-crack; round the corner, up the narrow street, down the paved hill on the other side; in the gutter; bump, bump; jolt, jog, crick, crick, crick; crack, crack, crack; into the shop-windows on the left-hand side of the street, preliminary to a sweeping turn into the wooden archway on the right; rumble, rumble, rumble; clatter, clatter, clatter; crick, crick, crick; and here we are in the yard of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or; used up, gone out, smoking, spent, exhausted; but sometimes making a false start unexpectedly, with nothing coming of it—like a firework to the last!

The landlady of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and the landlord of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and the femme de chambre of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and a gentleman in a glazed cap, with a red beard like a bosom friend, who is staying at the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and Monsieur le Curé is walking up and down in a corner of the yard by himself, with a shovel hat upon his head, and a black gown on his back, and a book in one hand, and an umbrella in the other; and everybody, except Monsieur le Curé, is open-mouthed and open-eyed, for the opening of the carriage door. The landlord of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or dotes to that extent upon the Courier, that he can hardly wait for his coming down from the box, but embraces his very legs and boot-heels as he descends. "My Courier! My brave Courier! My friend! My brother!" The landlady loves him, the femme de chambre blesses him, the garçon worships him. The Courier asks if his letter has been received? It has, it has. Are the rooms prepared? They are, they are. The best rooms for my noble Courier. The rooms of state for my gallant Courier; the whole house is at the service of my best of friends! He keeps his hand upon the carriage door, and asks some other question to enhance the expectation. He carries a green leathern purse outside his coat, suspended by a belt. The idlers look at it; one touches it. It is full of five-franc pieces. Murmurs of admiration are heard among the boys. The landlord falls upon the Courier's neck, and folds him to his breast. He is so much fatter than he was, he says. He looks so rosy and so well!

The door is opened. Breathless expectation. The lady of the family gets out. Ah, sweet lady! Beautiful lady! The sister of the lady of the family gets out. Great Heaven, mam'selle is charming! First little boy gets out. Ah, what a beautiful little boy! First little girl gets out. Oh, but this is an enchanting child! Second little girl gets out. The landlady, yielding to the finest impulse of our common nature, catches her up in her arms! Second

little boy gets out. Oh, the sweet boy! Oh, the tender little family! The baby is handed out. Angelic baby! The baby has topped everything. All the rapture is expended on the baby! Then the two nurses tumble out; and the enthusiasm swelling into madness, the whole family are swept up-stairs as on a cloud; while the idlers press about the carriage, and look into it, and walk round it, and touch it. For it is something to touch a carriage that has held so many people. It is a legacy to leave one's children.

The rooms are on the first floor, except the nursery for the night, which is a great rambling chamber, with four or five beds in it: through a dark passage, up two steps, down four, past a pump, across a balcony, and next door to the stable. The other sleeping apartments are large and lofty; each with two small bedsteads, tastefully hung, like the windows, with red and white drapery. The sitting-room is famous. Dinner is already laid in it for three; and the napkins are folded in cocked-hat fashion. The floors are of red tile. There are no carpets, and not much furniture to speak of; but there is abundance of looking-glass, and there are large vases under glass shades, filled with artificial flowers; and there are plenty of clocks. The whole party are in motion. The Brave Courier, in particular, is everywhere: looking after the beds, having wine poured down his throat by his dear brother the landlord, and picking up green cucumbers—always cucumbers; Heaven knows where he gets them—with which he walks about, one in each hand, like truncheons.

Dinner is announced. There is very thin soup; there are very large loaves—one apiece; a fish; four dishes afterwards; some poultry afterwards; a dessert afterwards; and no lack of wine. There is not much in the dishes; but they are very good, and always ready instantly. When it is nearly dark, the Brave Courier, having eaten the two cucumbers, sliced up in the contents of a pretty large decanter of oil, and another of vinegar, emerges from his retreat below, and proposes a visit to the Cathedral, whose massive tower frowns down upon the courtyard of the inn. Off we go; and very solemn and grand it is in the dim light: so dim at last, that the polite, old, lantern-jawed Sacristan has a feeble little bit of candle in his hand, to grope among the tombs with—and looks, among the grim columns, very like a lost ghost who is searching for his own.

Underneath the balcony, when we return, the inferior servants of the inn are supping in the open air, at a great table; the dish a stew of meat and vegetables, smoking hot, and served in the iron cauldron it was boiled in. They have a pitcher of thin wine, and are very merry; merrier than the gentleman with the red beard, who is playing billiards in the light room on the left of the yard, where shadows, with cues in their hands, and cigars in their mouths, cross and recross the window constantly. Still the thin Curé walks up and down alone, with his book and umbrella. And there he walks, and there the billiard balls rattle, long after we are fast asleep.

We are astir at six next morning. It is a delightful day, shaming yesterday's mud upon the carriage, if anything could shame a carriage, in a land where carriages are never cleaned. Everybody is brisk; and as we finish breakfast, the horses come jingling into the yard from the Post-house. Everything taken out of the carriage is put back again. The Brave Courier announces that all is ready, after walking into every room, and looking all round it, to be certain that nothing is left behind. Everybody gets in. Everybody connected with the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is again enchanted. The Brave Courier runs into the house for a parcel containing cold fowl, sliced ham, bread, and biscuits, for lunch; hands it into the coach; and runs back again.

What has he got in his hand now? More cucumbers? No. A long strip of paper. It's the bill.

The Brave Courier has two belts on this morning: one supporting the purse: another, a mighty good sort of leathern bottle, filled to the throat with the best light Bordeaux wine in the house. He never pays the bill till this bottle is full. Then he disputes it.

He disputes it now, violently. He is still the landlord's brother, but by another father or mother. He is not so nearly related to him as he was last night. The landlord scratches his head. The Brave Courier points to certain figures in the bill, and intimates that if they remain there, the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is thenceforth and for ever an hôtel de l'Ecu de cuivre. The landlord goes into a little counting-house. The Brave Courier follows, forces the bill and a pen into his hand, and talks more rapidly than ever. The landlord takes the pen. The Courier smiles. The landlord makes an alteration. The Courier cuts a joke. The landlord is affectionate, but not weakly so. He bears it like a man. He shakes hands with his brave brother, but he don't hug him. Still, he loves his brother; for he knows that he will be returning that way, one of

these fine days, with another family, and he foresees that his heart will yearn towards him again. The Brave Courier traverses all round the carriage once, looks at the drag, inspects the wheels, jumps up, gives the word, and away we go!

It is market morning. The market is held in the little square outside, in front of the cathedral. It is crowded with men and women, in blue, in red, in green, in white; with canvassed stalls; and fluttering merchandise. The country-people are grouped about, with their clean baskets before them. Here, the lace-sellers; there, the butter and egg sellers; there, the fruit-sellers; there, the shoemakers. The whole place looks as if it were the stage of some great theatre, and the curtain had just run up, for a picturesque ballet. And there is the cathedral to boot: scene-like: all grim, and swarthy, and mouldering, and cold: just splashing the pavement in one place with faint purple drops, as the morning sun, entering by a little window on the eastern side, struggles through some stained-glass panes on the western.

In five minutes we have passed the iron cross, with a little ragged kneeling-place of turf before it, in the outskirts of the town; and are again upon the road.

LYONS, THE RHONE, AND THE GOBLIN OF AVIGNON.

CHALONS is a fair resting-place, in right of its good inn on the bank of the river, and the little steamboats, gay with green and red paint, that come and go upon it: which make up a pleasant and refreshing scene, after the dusty roads. But unless you would like to dwell on an enormous plain, with jagged rows of irregular poplars on it, that look in the distance like so many combs with broken teeth: and unless you would like to pass your life without the possibility of going uphill, or going up anything but stairs: you would hardly approve of Chalons as a place of residence.

You would probably like it better, however, than Lyons; which you may reach, if you will, in one of the before-mentioned steamboats, in eight hours.

What a city Lyons is! Talk about people feeling, at certain unlucky times, as if they had tumbled from the clouds! Here is a whole town that has tumbled, anyhow, out of the sky; having been first caught up, like other stones that tumble down from that region, out of fens and barren places, dismal to behold! The two great streets through which the two great rivers dash, and all the little streets whose name is Legion, were scorching, blistering, and sweltering. The houses, high and vast, dirty to excess, rotten as old cheeses, and as thickly peopled. All up the hills that hem the city in, these houses swarm; and the mites inside were lolling out of the windows, and drying their ragged clothes on poles, and crawling in and out at the doors, and coming out to pant and gasp upon the pavement, and creeping in and out among huge piles and bales of fusty, musty, stifling goods; and living, or rather not dying till their time should come, in an exhausted receiver. Every manufacturing town, melted into one, would hardly convey an impression of Lyons as it presented itself to me: for all the undrained, unscavengered qualities of a foreign town seemed grafted, there, upon the native miseries of a manufacturing one; and it bears such fruit as I would go some miles out of my way to avoid encountering again.

In the cool of the evening: or rather, in the faded heat of the day: we went to see the Cathedral, where divers old women, and a few dogs, were engaged in contemplation. There was no difference, in point of cleanliness, between its stone pavement and that of the streets; and there was a wax saint, in a little box like a berth aboard ship, with a glass front to it, whom Madame Tussaud would have nothing to say to, on any terms, and which even Westminster Abbey might be ashamed of. If you would know all about the architecture of this church, or any other, its dates, dimensions, endowments, and history, is it not written in Mr. Murray's Guide-Book, and may you not read it there, with thanks to him, as I did?

For this reason, I should abstain from mentioning the curious clock in Lyons Cathedral, if it were not for a small mistake I made in connection with that piece of mechanism. The keeper of the church was very anxious it should be shown; partly for the honour of the establishment and the town; and partly, perhaps, because of his deriving a per-centage from the additional consideration. However that may be, it was set in motion, and thereupon a host of little doors flew open, and innumerable little figures staggered out of them, and jerked themselves back again, with that special unsteadiness of purpose, and hitching in the gait, which usually attaches to figures that are moved by clockwork. Meanwhile, the Sacristan stood explaining these wonders, and pointing them out, severally, with a

wand. There was a centre puppet of the Virgin Mary; and close to her, a small pigeon-hole, out of which another and a very ill-looking puppet made one of the most sudden plunges I ever saw accomplished; instantly flopping back again at sight of her, and banging his little door violently after him. Taking this to be emblematic of the victory over Sin and Death, and not at all unwilling to show that I perfectly understood the subject, in anticipation of the showman, I rashly said, "Aha! The Evil Spirit. To be sure. He is very soon disposed of." "Pardon, monsieur," said the Sacristan, with a polite motion of his hand towards the little door, as if introducing somebody—"the Angel Gabriel!"

Soon after daybreak next morning, we were steaming down the Arrowy Rhone, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, in a very dirty vessel full of merchandise, and with only three or four other passengers for our companions: among whom, the most remarkable was a silly, old, meek-faced, garlic-eating, immeasurably-polite Chevalier, with a dirty scrap of red ribbon hanging at his button-hole, as if he had tied it there to remind himself of something: as Tom Noddy, in the farce, ties knots in his pocket-handkerchief.

For the last two days we had seen great sullen hills, the first indications of the Alps, lowering in the distance. Now, we were rushing on beside them: sometimes close beside them: sometimes with an intervening slope, covered with vineyards. Villages and small towns hanging in mid-air, with great woods of olives seen through the light open towers of their churches, and clouds moving slowly on, upon the steep acclivity behind them; ruined castles perched on every eminence; and scattered houses in the clefts and gullies of the hills; made it very beautiful. The great height of these, too, making the buildings look so tiny, that they had all the charm of elegant models; their excessive whiteness, as contrasted with the brown rocks, or the sombre, deep, dull, heavy green of the olive-tree; and the puny size and little slow walk of the Lilliputian men and women on the bank; made a charming picture. There were ferries out of number, too; bridges; the famous Pont d'Esprit, with I don't know how many arches; towns where memorable wines are made; Valence, where Napoleon studied; and the noble river, bringing, at every winding turn, new beauties into view.

There lay before us, that same afternoon, the broken bridge of Avignon, and all the city baking in the sun; yet with an underdone-pie-crust, battlemented wall, that never will be brown, though it bake for centuries.

The grapes were hanging in clusters in the streets, and the brililant oleander was in full bloom everywhere. The streets are old and very narrow, but tolerably clean, and shaded by awnings stretched from house to house. Bright stuffs and handkerchiefs, curiosities, ancient frames of carved wood, old chairs, ghostly tables, saints, virgins, angels, and staring daubs of portraits being exposed for sale beneath, it was very quaint and lively. All this was much set off, too, by the glimpses one caught, through a rusty gate standing ajar, of quiet sleepy courtyards, having stately old houses within, as silent as tombs. It was all very like one of the descriptions in the Arabian Nights. The three one-eyed Calenders might have knocked at any one of those doors till the street rang again, and the porter who persisted in asking questions—the man who had the delicious purchases put into his basket in the morning—might have opened it quite naturally.

After breakfast next morning, we sallied forth to see the lions. Such a delicious breeze was blowing in, from the north, as made the walk delightful: though the pavement stones, and stones of the walls and houses, were far too hot to have a hand laid on them comfortably.

We went, first of all, up a rocky height, to the Cathedral: where Mass was performing to an auditory very like that of Lyons, namely, several old women, a baby, and a very self-possessed dog, who had marked out for himself a little course or platform for exercise, beginning at the altar-rails and ending at the door, up and down which constitutional walk he trotted, during the service, as methodically and calmly as any old gentleman out of doors. It is a bare old church, and the paintings in the roof are sadly defaced by time and damp weather; but the sun was shining in splendidly through the red curtains of the windows, and glittering on the altar furniture; and it looked as bright and cheerful as need be.

Going apart, in this church, to see some painting which was being executed in fresco by a French artist and his pupil, I was led to observe, more closely than I might otherwise have done, a great number of votive offerings with which the walls of the different chapels were profusely hung. I will not say decorated, for they were very roughly and comically got up: most likely by poor sign-painters, who eke out their living in that way. They were all little pictures: each representing some sickness or calamity from which the person placing it there had escaped, through the interposition of his or her patron saint, or of the Madonna; and I may refer to

them as good specimens of the class generally. They are abundant in Italy.

In a grotesque squareness of outline, and impossibility of perspective, they were not unlike the woodcuts in old books; but they were oil-paintings, and the artist, like the painter of the Primrose family, had not been sparing of his colours. In one, a lady was having her toe amputated—an operation which a saintly personage had sailed into the room, upon a cloud, to superintend. In another, a lady was lying in bed, tucked up very tight and prim, and staring with much composure at a tripod, with a slop-basin on it: the usual form of washing-stand, and the only piece of furniture, besides the bedstead, in her chamber. One would never have supposed her to be labouring under any complaint, beyond the inconvenience of being miraculously wide awake, if the painter had not hit upon the idea of putting all her family on their knees in one corner, with their legs sticking out behind them on the floor like boot-trees. Above whom, the Virgin, on a kind of blue divan, promised to restore the patient. In another case, a lady was in the very act of being run over, immediately outside the city walls, by a sort of piano-forte van. But the Madonna was there again. Whether the supernatural appearance had startled the horse (a bay griffin), or whether it was invisible to him, I don't know; but he was galloping away, ding-dong, without the smallest reverence or compunction. On every picture "Ex voto" was painted in yellow capitals in the sky.

Though votive offerings were not unknown in Pagan Temples, and are evidently among the many compromises made between the false religion and the true, when the true was in its infancy, I could wish that all the other compromises were as harmless. Gratitude and Devotion are Christian qualities; and a grateful, humble, Christian spirit may dictate the observance.

Hard by the cathedral stands the ancient Palace of the Popes, of which one portion is now a common gaol, and another a noisy barrack: while gloomy suites of state apartments, shut up and deserted, mock their own old state and glory, like the embalmed bodies of kings. But we neither went there to see state-rooms, nor soldiers' quarters, nor a common gaol, though we dropped some money into a prisoners' box outside, whilst the prisoners, themselves, looked through the iron bars, high up, and watched us eagerly. We went to see the ruins of the dreadful rooms in which the Inquisition used to sit.

A little, old, swarthy woman, with a pair of flashing black eyes,—proof that the world hadn't conjured down the devil within her, though it had had between sixty and seventy years to do it in,—came out of the Barrack Cabaret, of which she was the keeper, with some large keys in her hands, and marshalled us the way that we should go. How she told us, on the way, that she was a Government Officer (*concierge du palais apostolique*), and had been for I don't know how many years; and how she had shown these dungeons to princes; and how she was the best of dungeon demonstrators; and how she had resided in the palace from an infant,—had been born there, if I recollect right,—I needn't relate. But such a fierce, little, rapid, sparkling, energetic she-devil I never beheld. She was alight and flaming all the time. Her action was violent in the extreme. She never spoke without stopping expressly for the purpose. She stamped her feet, clutched us by the arms, flung herself into attitudes, hammered against walls with her keys, for mere emphasis: now whispered as if the Inquisition were there still: now shrieked as if she were on the rack herself; and had a mysterious, hag-like way with her forefinger, when approaching the remains of some new horror—looking back and walking stealthily, and making horrible grimaces—that might alone have qualified her to walk up and down a sick man's counterpane, to the exclusion of all other figures, through a whole fever.

Passing through the courtyard, among groups of idle soldiers, we turned off by a gate, which this She-Goblin unlocked for our admission, and locked again behind us: and entered a narrow court, rendered narrower by fallen stones and heaps of rubbish; part of it choking up the mouth of a ruined subterranean passage, that once communicated (or is said to have done so) with another castle on the opposite bank of the river. Close to this courtyard is a dungeon—we stood within it, in another minute—in the dismal tower *des oubliettes*, where Rienzi was imprisoned, fastened by an iron chain to the very wall that stands there now, but shut out from the sky which now looks down into it. A few steps brought us to the Cachots, in which the prisoners of the Inquisition were confined for forty-eight hours after their capture, without food or drink, that their constancy might be shaken, even before they were confronted with their gloomy judges. The day has not got in there yet, they are still small cells, shut in by four unyielding, close, hard walls; still profoundly dark; still massively doored and fastened, as of old.

Goblin, looking back as I have described,

went softly on, into a vaulted chamber, now used as a store-room: once the chapel of the Holy Office. The place where the tribunal sat was plain. The platform might have been removed but yesterday. Conceive the parable of the Good Samaritan having been painted on the wall of one of these Inquisition chambers! But it was, and may be traced there yet.

High up in the jealous wall are niches where the faltering replies of the accused were heard and noted down. Many of them had been brought out of the very cell we had just looked into, so awfully: along the same stone passage. We had trodden in their very footsteps.

I am gazing round me, with the horror that the place inspires, when Goblin clutches me by the wrist, and lays, not her skinny finger, but the handle of a key, upon her lip. She invites me, with a jerk, to follow her. I do so. She leads me out into a room adjoining—a rugged room, with a funnel-shaped, contracting roof, open at the top to the bright day. I ask her what it is. She folds her arms, leers hideously, and stares. I ask again. She glances round, to see that all the little company are there; sits down upon a mound of stones; throws up her arms, and yells out, like a fiend, "La Salle de la Question!"

The Chamber of Torture! And the roof was made of that shape to stifle the victim's cries! Oh, Goblin, Goblin, let us think of this awhile in silence. Peace, Goblin! Sit with your short arms crossed on your short legs, upon that heap of stones, for only five minutes, and then flame out again.

Minutes! Seconds are not marked upon the Palace clock, when, with her eyes flashing fire, Goblin is up, in the middle of the chamber, describing, with her sunburnt arms, a wheel of heavy blows. Thus it ran round! cries Goblin. Mash, mash, mash! An endless routine of heavy hammers. Mash, mash, mash! upon the sufferer's limbs. See the stone trough! says Goblin. For the water torture! Gurgle, swill, bloat, burst, for the Redeemer's honour! Suck the bloody rag, deep down into your unbelieving body, Heretic, at every breath you draw. And when the executioner plucks it out, reeking with the smaller mysteries of God's own Image, know us for His chosen servants, true believers in the Sermon on the Mount, elect disciples of Him who never did a miracle but to heal: who never struck a man with palsy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, madness, any one affliction of mankind; and never stretched His blessed hand out, but to give relief and ease!

See! cries Goblin. There the furnace was. There they made the irons red-hot. Those holes supported the sharp stake, on which the tortured persons hung poised: dangling with their whole weight from the roof. "But"—and Goblin whispers this—"Monsieur has heard of this tower? Yes? Let Monsieur look down then!"

A cold air, laden with an earthy smell, falls upon the face of Monsieur; for she has opened, while speaking, a trap-door in the wall. Monsieur looks in. Downward to the bottom, upward to the top, of a steep, dark, lofty tower: very dismal, very dark, very cold. The Executioner of the Inquisition, says Goblin, edging in her head to look down also, flung those who were past all further torturing down here. "But look! does Monsieur see the black stains on the wall?" A glance, over his shoulder, at Goblin's keen eye, shows Monsieur—and would without the aid of the directing key—where they are. "What are they?" "Blood!"

In October, 1791, when the Revolution was at its height here, sixty persons: men and women ("and priests," says Goblin, "priests"): were murdered, and hurled, the dying and the dead, into this dreadful pit, where a quantity of quicklime was tumbled down upon their bodies. Those ghastly tokens of the massacre were soon no more; but while one stone of the strong building in which the deed was done remains upon another, there they will lie in the memories of men, as plain to see as the splashing of their blood upon the wall is now.

Was it a portion of the great scheme of Retribution that the cruel deed should be committed in this place? That a part of the atrocities and monstrous institutions, which had been, for scores of years, at work, to change men's nature, should, in its last service, tempt them with the ready means of gratifying their furious and beastly rage? Should enable them to show themselves, in the height of their frenzy, no worse than a great, solemn, legal establishment in the height of its power? No worse! Much better. They used the Tower of the Forgotten in the name of Liberty—their liberty; an earth-born creature, nursed in the black mud of the Bastille moats and dungeons, and necessarily betraying many evidences of its unwholesome bringing-up—but the Inquisition used it in the name of Heaven.

Goblin's finger is lifted; and she steals out again into the Chapel of the Holy Office. She stops at a certain part of the flooring. Her great effect is at hand. She waits for the rest. She darts at the Brave Courier, who is explaining something; hits him a sounding rap on the hat with the largest key: and bids him be silent.

She assembles us all round a little trap-door in the floor, as round a grave. "Voilà!" she darts down at the ring, and flings the door open with a crash, in her goblin energy, though it is no light weight. "Voilà les oubliettes! Voilà les oubliettes! Subterranean! Frightful! Black! Terrible! Deadly! Les oubliettes de l'Inquisition!"

My blood ran cold as I looked from Goblin, down into the vaults, where these forgotten creatures, with recollections of the world outside: of wives, friends, children, brothers: starved to death, and made the stones ring with their unavailing groans. But, the thrill I felt on seeing the accursed wall below, decayed and broken through, and the sun shining in through its gaping wounds, was like a sense of victory and triumph. I felt exalted with the proud delight of living, in these degenerate times, to see it. As if I were the hero of some high achievement! The light in the doleful vaults was typical of the light that has streamed in on all persecution in God's name, but which is not yet at its noon! It cannot look more lovely to a blind man newly restored to sight, than to a traveller who sees it, calmly and majestically, treading down the darkness of that Infernal Well.

AVIGNON TO GENOA.

GOBLIN, having shown *les oubliettes*, felt that her great *coup* was struck. She let the door fall with a crash, and stood upon it with her arms a-kimbo, sniffing prodigiously.

When we left the place, I accompanied her into her house, under the outer gateway of the fortress, to buy a little history of the building. Her cabaret, a dark low room, lighted by small windows, sunk in the thick wall—in the softened light, and with its forge-like chimney; its little counter by the door, with bottles, jars, and glasses on it; its household implements and scraps of dress against the wall; and a sober-looking woman (she must have a congenial life of it with Goblin) knitting at the door—looked exactly like a picture by OSTADE.

I walked round the building on the outside, in a sort of dream, and yet with the delightful sense of having awakened from it, of which the light, down in the vaults, had given me the assurance. The immense thickness and giddy height of the walls, the enormous strength of the massive towers, the great extent of the building, its gigantic proportions, frowning aspect, and barbarous irregularity, awaken awe and wonder. The recollection of its opposite old uses: an impregnable fortress, a luxurious palace, a horrible prison, a place of torture, the court of the Inquisition: at one and the same time, a house of feasting, fighting, religion, and blood: gives to every stone in its huge form a fearful interest, and imparts new meaning to its incongruities. I could think of little, however, then, or long afterwards, but the sun in the dungeons. The palace coming down to be the lounging-place of noisy soldiers, and being forced to echo their rough talk and common oaths, and to have their garments fluttering from its dirty windows, was some reduction of its state, and something to rejoice at; but the day in its cells, and the sky for the roof of its chambers of cruelty—that was its desolation and defeat! If I had seen it in a blaze from ditch to rampart, I should have felt that not that light, nor all the light in all the fire that burns, could waste it, like the sunbeams in its secret council-chamber and its prisons.

Before I quit this Palace of the Popes, let me translate from the little history I mentioned just now a short anecdote, quite appropriate to itself, connected with its adventures.

"An ancient tradition relates, that in 1441, a nephew of Pierre de Lude, the Pope's legate, seriously insulted some distinguished ladies of Avignon, whose relations, in revenge, seized the young man and horribly mutilated him. For several years the legate kept *his* revenge within his own breast, but he was not the less resolved upon its gratification at last. He even made, in the fulness of time, advances towards a complete reconciliation; and when their apparent sincerity had prevailed, he invited to a splendid banquet, in this palace, certain families, whole families, whom he sought to exterminate. The utmost gaiety animated the repast; but the measures of the legate were well taken. When the dessert was on the board, a Swiss presented himself, with the announcement that a strange ambassador solicited an extraordinary audience. The legate, excusing himself, for the moment, to his guests, retired, followed by his officers. Within a few moments afterwards, five hundred persons were reduced to ashes: the whole of that wing of the building having been blown into the air with a terrible explosion!"

After seeing the churches (I will not trouble you with churches just now), we left Avignon that afternoon. The heat being very great, the roads outside the walls were strewn with people fast asleep in every little slip of shade, and with lazy groups, half asleep and half awake, who

were waiting until the sun should be low enough to admit of their playing bowls among the burnt-up trees, and on the dusty road. The harvest here was already gathered in, and mules and horses were treading out the corn in the fields. We came, at dusk, upon a wild and hilly country, once famous for brigands: and travelled slowly up a steep ascent. So we went on until eleven at night, when we halted at the town of Aix (within two stages of Marseilles) to sleep.

The hotel, with all the blinds and shutters closed to keep the light and heat out, was comfortable and airy next morning, and the town was very clean; but so hot, and so intensely light, that when I walked out at noon it was like coming suddenly from the darkened room into crisp blue fire. The air was so very clear, that distant hills and rocky points appeared within an hour's walk: while the town immediately at hand—with a kind of blue wind between me and it—seemed to be white-hot, and to be throwing off a fiery air from its surface.

We left this town towards evening, and took the road to Marseilles. A dusty road it was; the houses shut up close; and the vines powdered white. At nearly all the cottage doors women were peeling and slicing onions into earthen bowls for supper. So they had been doing last night all the way from Avignon. We passed one or two shady dark châteaux, surrounded by trees, and embellished with cool basins of water: which were the more refreshing to behold, from the great scarcity of such residences on the road we had travelled. As we approached Marseilles, the road began to be covered with holiday people. Outside the public-houses were parties smoking, drinking, playing draughts and cards, and (once) dancing. But dust, dust, dust everywhere. We went on, through a long, straggling, dirty suburb, thronged with people; having on our left a dreary slope of land, on which the country houses of the Marseilles merchants, always staring white, are jumbled and heaped without the slightest order: backs, fronts, sides, and gables towards all points of the compass; until, at last, we entered the town.

I was there twice or thrice afterwards, in fair weather and foul; and I am afraid there is no doubt that it is a dirty and disagreeable place. But the prospect, from the fortified heights, of the beautiful Mediterranean, with its lovely rocks and islands, is most delightful. These heights are a desirable retreat, for less picturesque reasons—as an escape from a compound of vile smells perpetually arising from a great harbour full of stagnant water, and befouled by the refuse of innumerable ships with all sorts of cargoes: which, in hot weather, is dreadful in the last degree.

There were foreign sailors, of all nations, in the streets; with red shirts, blue shirts, buff shirts, tawny shirts, and shirts of orange colour; with red caps, blue caps, green caps, great beards, and no beards; in Turkish turbans, glazed English hats, and Neapolitan head-dresses. There were the townspeople sitting in clusters on the pavement, or airing themselves on the tops of their houses, or walking up and down the closest and least airy of Boulevards; and there were crowds of fierce-looking people of the lower sort, blocking up the way, constantly. In the very heart of all this stir and uproar was the common madhouse; a low, contracted, miserable building, looking straight upon the street, without the smallest screen or courtyard; where chattering madmen and madwomen were peeping out, through rusty bars, at the staring faces below, while the sun, darting fiercely aslant into their little cells, seemed to dry up their brains, and worry them, as if they were baited by a pack of dogs.

We were pretty well accommodated at the Hôtel du Paradis, situated in a narrow street of very high houses, with a hairdresser's shop opposite, exhibiting in one of its windows two full-length waxen ladies, twirling round and round: which so enchanted the hairdresser himself, that he and his family sat in arm-chairs, and in cool undresses, on the pavement outside, enjoying the gratification of the passers-by, with lazy dignity. The family had retired to rest when we went to bed at midnight; but the hairdresser (a corpulent man, in drab slippers) was still sitting there, with his legs stretched out before him, and evidently couldn't bear to have the shutters put up.

Next day we went down to the harbour, where the sailors of all nations were discharging and taking in cargoes of all kinds: fruits, wines, oils, silks, stuffs, velvets, and every manner of merchandise. Taking one of the great number of lively little boats with gay-striped awnings, we rowed away, under the sterns of great ships, under tow-ropes and cables, against and among other boats, and very much too near the sides of vessels that were faint with oranges, to the *Marie Antoinette*, a handsome steamer bound for Genoa, lying near the mouth of the harbour. By-and-by, the carriage, that unwieldy "trifle from the Pantechnicon," on a flat barge, bumping against everything, and giving occasion for a prodigious quantity of oaths and grimaces, came stupidly alongside; and by five o'clock

we were steaming out in the open sea. The vessel was beautifully clean; the meals were served under an awning on deck; the night was calm and clear; the quiet beauty of the sea and sky unspeakable.

We were off Nice early next morning, and coasted along, within a few miles of the Cornice Road (of which more in its place), nearly all day. We could see Genoa before three; and watching it as it gradually developed its splendid amphitheatre, terrace rising above terrace, garden above garden, palace above palace, height upon height, was ample occupation for us, till we ran into the stately harbour. Having been duly astonished here by the sight of a few Cappuccini monks, who were watching the fair-weighing of some wood upon the wharf, we drove off to Albaro, two miles distant, where we had engaged a house.

The way lay through the main streets, but not through the Strada Nuova, or the Strada Balbi, which are the famous streets of palaces. I never, in my life, was so dismayed! The wonderful novelty of everything, the unusual smells, the unaccountable filth (though it is reckoned the cleanest of Italian towns), the disorderly jumbling of dirty houses, one upon the roof of another; the passages more squalid and more close than any in St. Giles's or old Paris; in and out of which, not vagabonds, but well-dressed women, with white veils and great fans, were passing and repassing; the perfect absence of resemblance in any dwelling-house, or shop, or wall, or post, or pillar, to anything one had ever seen before; and the disheartening dirt, discomfort, and decay; perfectly confounded me. I fell into a dismal reverie. I am conscious of a feverish and bewildered vision of saints' and virgins' shrines at the street corners —of great numbers of friars, monks, and soldiers —of vast red curtains, waving in the doorways of the churches—of always going uphill, and yet seeing every other street and passage going higher up—of fruit-stalls, with fresh lemons and oranges hanging in garlands made of vine-leaves —of a guard-house, and a drawbridge—and some gateways—and vendors of iced water, sitting with little trays upon the margin of the kennel—and this is all the consciousness I had, until I was set down in a rank, dull, weedy courtyard, attached to a kind of pink gaol; and was told I lived there.

I little thought, that day, that I should ever come to have an attachment for the very stones in the streets of Genoa, and to look back upon the city with affection as connected with many hours of happiness and quiet! But these are my first impressions honestly set down; and how they changed I will set down too. At present, let us breathe after this long-winded journey.

GENOA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

THE first impressions of such a place as ALBARO, the suburb of Genoa where I am now, as my American friends would say, "located," can hardly fail, I should imagine, to be mournful and disappointing. It requires a little time and use to overcome the feeling of depression consequent, at first, on so much ruin and neglect. Novelty, pleasant to most people, is particularly delightful, I think, to me. I am not easily dispirited when I have the means of pursuing my own fancies and occupations; and I believe I have some natural aptitude for accommodating myself to circumstances. But, as yet, I stroll about here, in all the holes and corners of the neighbourhood, in a perpetual state of forlorn surprise; and returning to my villa; the Villa Bagnerello; (it sounds romantic, but Signor Bagnerello is a butcher hard by), have sufficient occupation in pondering over my new experiences, and comparing them, very much to my own amusement, with my expectations, until I wander out again.

The Villa Bagnerello: or the Pink Gaol, a far more expressive name for the mansion: is in one of the most splendid situations imaginable. The noble bay of Genoa, with the deep blue Mediterranean, lie stretched out near at hand; monstrous old desolate houses and palaces are dotted all about; lofty hills, with their tops often hidden in the clouds, and with strong forts perched high up on their craggy sides, are close upon the left; and in front, stretching from the walls of the house, down to a ruined chapel which stands upon the bold and picturesque rocks on the seashore, are green vineyards, where you may wander all day long in partial shade, through interminable vistas of grapes, trained on a rough trellis-work across the narrow paths.

This sequestered spot is approached by lanes so very narrow, that when we arrived at the Custom House, we found the people here had *taken the measure* of the narrowest among them, and were waiting to apply it to the carriage; which ceremony was gravely performed in the street, while we all stood by, in breathless suspense. It was found to be a very tight fit, but just a possibility, and no more—as I am reminded every day, by the sight of various large

holes which it punched in the walls on either side as it came along. We are more fortunate, I am told, than an old lady who took a house in these parts not long ago, and who stuck fast in *her* carriage in a lane; and as it was impossible to open one of the doors, she was obliged to submit to the indignity of being hauled through one of the little front windows like a harlequin.

When you have got through these narrow lanes, you come to an archway, imperfectly stopped up by a rusty old gate—my gate. The rusty old gate has a bell to correspond, which you ring as long as you like, and which nobody answers, as it has no connection whatever with the house. But there is a rusty old knocker, too—very loose, so that it slides round when you touch it—and if you learn the trick of it, and knock long enough, somebody comes. The Brave Courier comes, and gives you admittance. You walk into a seedy little garden, all wild and weedy, from which the vineyard opens; cross it, enter a square hall like a cellar, walk up a cracked marble staircase, and pass into a most enormous room with a vaulted roof and white-washed walls: not unlike a great Methodist chapel. This is the *sala*. It has five windows and five doors, and is decorated with pictures which would gladden the heart of one of those picture-cleaners in London who hang up, as a sign, a picture divided, like death and the lady at the top of the old ballad: which always leaves you in a state of uncertainty whether the ingenious professor has cleaned one half or dirtied the other. The furniture of this *sala* is a sort of red brocade. All the chairs are immovable, and the sofa weighs several tons.

On the same floor, and opening out of this same chamber, are dining-room, drawing-room, and divers bedrooms: each with a multiplicity of doors and windows. Up-stairs are divers other gaunt chambers, and a kitchen; and down-stairs is another kitchen, which, with all sorts of strange contrivances for burning charcoal, looks like an alchemical laboratory. There are also some half-dozen small sitting-rooms, where the servants, in this hot July, may escape from the heat of the fire, and where the Brave Courier plays all sorts of musical instruments of his own manufacture, all the evening long. A mighty old, wandering, ghostly, echoing, grim, bare house it is, as ever I beheld or thought of.

There is a little vine-covered terrace, opening from the drawing-room; and under this terrace, and forming one side of the little garden, is what used to be the stable. It is now a cow-house, and has three cows in it, so that we get new milk by the bucketful. There is no pasturage near, and they never go out, but are constantly lying down, and surfeiting themselves with vine-leaves—perfect Italian cows—enjoying the *dolce far niente* all day long. They are presided over, and slept with, by an old man named Antonio, and his son; two burnt-sienna natives with naked legs and feet, who wear, each, a shirt, a pair of trousers, and a red sash, with a relic, or some sacred charm like a bonbon off a twelfth-cake, hanging round the neck. The old man is very anxious to convert me to the Catholic Faith; and exhorts me frequently. We sit upon a stone by the door sometimes, in the evening, like Robinson Crusoe and Friday reversed; and he generally relates, towards my conversion, an abridgment of the History of St. Peter—chiefly, I believe, from the unspeakable delight he has in his imitation of the cock.

The view, as I have said, is charming; but in the day you must keep the lattice blinds close shut, or the sun would drive you mad; and when the sun goes down, you must shut up all the windows, or the mosquitoes would tempt you to commit suicide. So, at this time of the year, you don't see much of the prospect within doors. As for the flies, you don't mind them. Nor the fleas, whose size is prodigious, and whose name is Legion, and who populate the coach-house to that extent that I daily expect to see the carriage going off bodily, drawn by myriads of industrious fleas in harness. The rats are kept away, quite comfortably, by scores of lean cats, who roam about the garden for that purpose. The lizards, of course, nobody cares for; they play in the sun, and don't bite. The little scorpions are merely curious. The beetles are rather late, and have not appeared yet. The frogs are company. There is a preserve of them in the grounds of the next villa; and, after nightfall, one would think that scores upon scores of women in pattens were going up and down a wet stone pavement without a moment's cessation. That is exactly the noise they make.

The ruined chapel, on the picturesque and beautiful seashore, was dedicated, once upon a time, to St. John the Baptist. I believe there is a legend that St. John's bones were received there, with various solemnities, when they were first brought to Genoa; for Genoa possesses them to this day. When there is any uncommon tempest at sea, they are brought out and exhibited to the raging weather, which they never fail to calm. In consequence of this connection of St. John with the city, great numbers of the common people are christened Giovanni Baptista, which latter name is pronounced in the

Genoese patois "Batcheetcha," like a sneeze. To hear everybody calling everybody else Batcheetcha, on a Sunday, or Festa-day, when there are crowds in the streets, is not a little singular and amusing to a stranger.

The narrow lanes have great villas opening into them, whose walls (outside walls, I mean) are profusely painted with all sorts of subjects, grim and holy. But time and the sea air have nearly obliterated them; and they look like the entrance to Vauxhall Gardens on a sunny day. The courtyards of these houses are overgrown with grass and weeds; all sorts of hideous patches cover the bases of the statues, as if they were afflicted with a cutaneous disorder; the outer gates are rusty; and the iron bars outside the lower windows are all tumbling down. Firewood is kept in halls where costly treasures might be heaped up, mountains high; waterfalls are dry and choked; fountains too dull to play, and too lazy to work, have just enough recollection of their identity, in their sleep, to make the neighbourhood damp; and the sirocco wind is often blowing over all these things for days together, like a gigantic oven out for a holiday.

Not long ago, there was a festa-day in honour of the *Virgin's mother*, when the young men of the neighbourhood, having worn green wreaths of the vine in some procession or other, bathed in them by scores. It looked very odd and pretty. Though I am bound to confess (not knowing of the festa at that time), that I thought, and was quite satisfied, they wore them as horses do—to keep the flies off.

Soon afterwards, there was another festa-day, in honour of a St. Nazaro. One of the Albaro young men brought two large bouquets soon after breakfast, and coming up-stairs into the great *sala*, presented them himself. This was a polite way of begging for a contribution towards the expenses of some music in the Saint's honour, so we gave him whatever it may have been, and his messenger departed: well satisfied. At six o'clock in the evening we went to the church—close at hand—a very gaudy place, hung all over with festoons and bright draperies, and filled, from the altar to the main door, with women, all seated. They wear no bonnets here, simply a long white veil—the "mezzero;" and it was the most gauzy, ethereal-looking audience I ever saw. The young women are not generally pretty, but they walk remarkably well, and, in their personal carriage and the management of their veils, display much innate grace and elegance. There were some men present: not very many: and a few of these were kneeling about the aisles, while everybody else tumbled over them. Innumerable tapers were burning in the church; the bits of silver and tin about the saints (especially in the Virgin's necklace) sparkled brilliantly; the priests were seated about the chief altar; the organ played away lustily, and a full band did the like; while a conductor, in a little gallery opposite to the band, hammered away on the desk before him with a scroll; and a tenor, without any voice, sang. The band played one way, the organ played another, the singer went a third, and the unfortunate conductor banged and banged, and flourished his scroll on some principle of his own: apparently well satisfied with the whole performance. I never did hear such a discordant din. The heat was intense all the time.

The men, in red caps, and with loose coats hanging on their shoulders (they never put them on), were playing bowls, and buying sweetmeats, immediately outside the church. When half-a-dozen of them finished a game, they came into the aisle, crossed themselves with the holy water, knelt on one knee for an instant, and walked off again to play another game at bowls. They are remarkably expert at this diversion, and will play in the stony lanes and streets, and on the most uneven and disastrous ground for such a purpose, with as much nicety as on a billiard-table. But the most favourite game is the national one of Mora, which they pursue with surprising ardour, and at which they will stake everything they possess. It is a destructive kind of gambling, requiring no accessories but the ten fingers, which are always—I intend no pun—at hand. Two men play together. One calls a number—say the extreme one, ten. He marks what portion of it he pleases by throwing out three, or four, or five fingers; and his adversary has, in the same instant, at hazard, and without seeing his hand, to throw out as many fingers as will make the exact balance. Their eyes and hands become so used to this, and act with such astonishing rapidity, that an uninitiated bystander would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to follow the progress of the game. The initiated, however, of whom there is always an eager group looking on, devour it with the most intense avidity; and as they are always ready to champion one side or the other in case of a dispute, and are frequently divided in their partisanship, it is often a very noisy proceeding. It is never the quietest game in the world; for the numbers are always called in a loud sharp voice, and follow as close upon each other as they can be counted. On a holiday

evening, standing at a window, or walking in a garden, or passing through the streets, or sauntering in any quiet place about the town, you will hear this game in progress in a score of wine-shops at once; and looking over any vineyard walk, or turning almost any corner, will come upon a knot of players in full cry. It is observable that most men have a propensity to throw out some particular number oftener than another; and the vigilance with which two sharp-eyed players will mutually endeavour to detect this weakness, and adapt their game to it, is very curious and entertaining. The effect is greatly heightened by the universal suddenness and vehemence of gesture; two men playing for half a farthing with an intensity as all-absorbing as if the stake were life.

Hard by here is a large Palazzo, formerly belonging to some member of the Brignole family, but just now hired by a school of Jesuits for their summer quarters. I walked into its dismantled precincts the other evening about sunset, and couldn't help pacing up and down for a little time, drowsily taking in the aspect of the place: which is repeated hereabouts in all directions.

I loitered to and fro under a colonnade, forming two sides of a weedy, grass-grown courtyard, whereof the house formed a third side, and a low terrace walk, overlooking the garden and the neighbouring hills, the fourth. I don't believe there was an uncracked stone in the whole pavement. In the centre was a melancholy statue, so piebald in its decay, that it looked exactly as if it had been covered with sticking-plaster, and afterwards powdered. The stables, coach-houses, offices, were all empty, all ruinous, all utterly deserted.

Doors had lost their hinges, and were holding on by their latches; windows were broken, painted plaster had peeled off, and was lying about in clods; fowls and cats had so taken possession of the out-buildings, that I couldn't help thinking of the fairy tales, and eyeing them with suspicion, as transformed retainers waiting to be changed back again. One old Tom in particular: a scraggy brute, with a hungry green eye (a poor relation, in reality, I am inclined to think): came prowling round and round me, as if he half believed, for the moment, that I might be the hero come to marry the lady, and set all to rights; but discovering his mistake, he suddenly gave a grim snarl, and walked away with such a tremendous tail, that he couldn't get into the little hole where he lived, but was obliged to wait outside, until his indignation and his tail had gone down together.

In a sort of summer-house, or whatever it may be, in this colonnade, some Englishmen had been living, like grubs in a nut; but the Jesuits had given them notice to go, and they had gone, and *that* was shut up too. The house: a wandering, echoing, thundering barrack of a place, with the lower windows barred up, as usual: was wide open at the door; and I have no doubt I might have gone in, and gone to bed, and gone dead, and nobody a bit the wiser. Only one suite of rooms on an upper floor was tenanted; and from one of these, the voice of a young-lady vocalist, practising bravura lustily, came flaunting out upon the silent evening.

I went down into the garden, intended to be prim and quaint, with avenues, and terraces, and orange-trees, and statues, and water in stone basins; and everything was green, gaunt, weedy, straggling, undergrown, or overgrown, mildewy, damp, redolent of all sorts of slabby, clammy, creeping, and uncomfortable life. There was nothing bright in the whole scene but a fire-fly—one solitary fire-fly—showing against the dark bushes like the last little speck of the departed Glory of the house; and even it went flitting up and down at sudden angles, and leaving a place with a jerk, and describing an irregular circle, and returning to the same place with a twitch that startled one: as if it were looking for the rest of the Glory, and wondering (Heaven knows it might!) what had become of it.

In the course of two mouths, the flitting shapes and shadows of my dismal entering reverie gradually resolved themselves into familiar forms and substances; and I already began to think that when the time should come, a year hence, for closing the long holiday and turning back to England, I might part from Genoa with anything but a glad heart.

It is a place that "grows upon you" every day. There seems to be always something to find out in it. There are the most extraordinary alleys and by-ways to walk about in. You can lose your way (what a comfort that is, when you are idle!) twenty times a day, if you like; and turn up again, under the most unexpected and surprising difficulties. It abounds in the strangest contrasts; things that are picturesque, ugly, mean, magnificent, delightful, and offensive, break upon the view at every turn.

They who would know how beautiful the country immediately surrounding Genoa is, should climb (in clear weather) to the top of Monte Faccio, or, at least, ride round the city walls: a feat more easily performed. No prospect can be more diversified and lovely than

the changing views of the harbour, and the valleys of the two rivers, the Polcevera and the Bizagno, from the heights along which the strongly fortified walls are carried, like the great wall of China in little. In not the least picturesque part of this ride, there is a fair specimen of a real Genoese tavern, where the visitor may derive good entertainment from real Genoese dishes, such as Tagliarini; Ravioli; German sausages, strong of garlic, sliced and eaten with fresh green figs; cocks' combs and sheep-kidneys, chopped up with mutton chops and liver; small pieces of some unknown part of a calf, twisted into small shreds, fried, and served up in a great dish like whitebait; and other curiosities of that kind. They often get wine at these suburban Trattorie, from France and Spain and Portugal, which is brought over by small captains in little trading vessels. They buy it at so much a bottle, without asking what it is, or caring to remember if anybody tells them, and usually divide it into two heaps; of

PLAYING AT MORA.

which they label one Champagne, and the other Madeira. The various opposite flavours, qualities, countries, ages, and vintages that are comprised under these two general heads are quite extraordinary. The most limited range is probably from cool Gruel up to old Marsala, and down again to apple Tea.

The great majority of the streets are as narrow as any thoroughfare can well be, where people (even Italian people) are supposed to live and walk about; being mere lanes, with here and there a kind of well, or breathing-place. The houses are immensely high, painted in all sorts of colours, and are in every stage and state of damage, dirt, and lack of repair. They are commonly let off in floors, or flats, like the houses in the old town of Edinburgh, or many houses in Paris. There are few street-doors; the entrance-halls are, for the most part, looked upon as public property; and any moderately enterprising scavenger might make a fine fortune by now and then clearing them out. As it

is impossible for coaches to penetrate into these streets, there are sedan-chairs, gilded and otherwise, for hire in divers places. A great many private chairs are also kept among the nobility and gentry; and at night these are trotted to and fro in all directions, preceded by bearers of great lanterns, made of linen stretched upon a frame. The sedans and lanterns are the legitimate successors of the long strings of patient and much-abused mules, that go jingling their little bells through these confined streets all day long. They follow them as regularly as the stars the sun.

When shall I forget the Streets of Palaces: the Strada Nuova and the Strada Balbi? or how the former looked one summer day, when I first saw it underneath the brightest and most intensely blue of summer skies: which its narrow perspective of immense mansions reduced to a tapering and most precious strip of brightness, looking down upon the heavy shade below? A brightness not too common, even in July and August, to be well esteemed: for, if the Truth must out, there were not eight blue skies in as many midsummer weeks, saving, sometimes, early in the morning; when, looking out to sea, the water and the firmament were one world of deep and brilliant blue. At other times there were clouds and haze enough to make an Englishman grumble in his own climate.

The endless details of these rich Palaces: the walls of some of them, within, alive with masterpieces by Vandyke! The great, heavy, stone balconies, one above another, and tier over tier: with here and there one larger than the rest, towering high up—a huge marble platform; the doorless vestibules, massively barred lower windows, immense public staircases, thick marble pillars, strong dungeon-like arches, and dreary, dreaming, echoing vaulted chambers: among which the eye wanders again, and again, and again, as every palace is succeeded by another—the terrace gardens between house and house, with green arches of the vine, and groves of orange-trees and blushing oleander in full bloom, twenty, thirty, forty feet above the street—the painted halls, mouldering, and blotting, and rotting in the damp corners, and still shining out in beautiful colours and voluptuous designs, where the walls are dry—the faded figures on the outsides of the houses, holding wreaths, and crowns, and flying upward and downward, and standing in niches, and here and there looking fainter and more feeble than elsewhere, by contrast with some fresh little Cupids, who, on a more recently decorated portion of the front, are stretching out what seems to be the semblance of a blanket, but is, indeed, a sun-dial—the steep, steep, uphill streets of small palaces (but very large palaces for all that), with marble terraces looking down into close by-ways—the magnificent and innumerable churches; and the rapid passage from a street of stately edifices, into a maze of the vilest squalor, steaming with unwholesome stenches, and swarming with half-naked children and whole worlds of dirty people—make up, altogether, such a scene of wonder: so lively, and yet so dead: so noisy, and yet so quiet: so obtrusive, and yet so shy and lowering: so wide awake, and yet so fast asleep: that it is a sort of intoxication to a stranger to walk on, and on, and on, and look about him. A bewildering phantasmagoria, with all the inconsistency of a dream, and all the pain and all the pleasure of an extravagant reality!

The different uses to which some of these Palaces are applied, all at once, is characteristic. For instance, the English Banker (my excellent and hospitable friend) has his office in a good-sized Palazzo in the Strada Nuova. In the hall (every inch of which is elaborately painted, but which is as dirty as a police-station in London), a hook-nosed Saracen's Head with an immense quantity of black hair (there is a man attached to it) sells walking-sticks. On the other side of the doorway, a lady with a showy handkerchief for head-dress (wife to the Saracen's Head, I believe) sells articles of her own knitting; and sometimes flowers. A little further in, two or three blind men occasionally beg. Sometimes they are visited by a man without legs, on a little go-cart, but who has such a fresh-coloured, lively face, and such a respectable, well-conditioned body, that he looks as if he had sunk into the ground up to his middle, or had come, but partially, up a flight of cellar steps to speak to somebody. A little further in, a few men, perhaps, lie asleep in the middle of the day; or they may be chairmen waiting for their absent freight. If so, they have brought their chairs in with them, and there *they* stand also. On the left of the hall is a little room: a hatter's shop. On the first floor is the English bank. On the first floor, also, is a whole house, and a good large residence too. Heaven knows what there may be above that; but, when you are there, you have only just begun to go up-stairs. And yet, coming down-stairs again, thinking of this; and passing out at a great crazy door in the back of the hall, instead of turning the other way, to get into the street again; it bangs behind you, making the dismallest and most lonesome echoes,

and you stand in a yard (the yard of the same house) which seems to have been unvisited by human foot for a hundred years. Not a sound disturbs its repose. Not a head thrust out of any of the grim, dark, jealous windows within sight, makes the weeds in the cracked pavement faint of heart, by suggesting the possibility of there being hands to grub them up. Opposite to you is a giant figure carved in stone, reclining, with an urn upon a lofty piece of artificial rockwork; and out of the urn dangles the fag-end of a leaden pipe, which, once upon a time, poured a small torrent down the rocks. But the eye-sockets of the giant are not drier than this channel is now. He seems to have given his urn, which is nearly upside down, a final tilt; and after crying, like a sepulchral child, "All gone!" to have lapsed into a stony silence.

In the streets of shops the houses are much smaller, but of great size notwithstanding, and extremely high. They are very dirty: quite undrained, if my nose be at all reliable: and emit a peculiar fragrance, like the smell of very bad cheese kept in very hot blankets. Notwithstanding the height of the houses, there would seem to have been a lack of room in the city, for new houses are thrust in everywhere. Wherever it has been possible to cram a tumble-down tenement into a crack or corner, in it has gone. If there be a nook or angle in the wall of a church, or a crevice in any other dead wall, of any sort, there you are sure to find some kind of habitation: looking as if it had grown there, like a fungus. Against the Government House, against the old Senate House, round about any large building, little shops stick close, like parasite vermin to the great carcase. And for all this, look where you may: up steps, down steps, anywhere, everywhere: there are irregular houses, receding, starting forward, tumbling down, leaning against their neighbours, crippling themselves or their friends by some means or other, until one, more irregular than the rest, chokes up the way, and you can't see any further.

One of the rottenest-looking parts of the town, I think, is down by the landing-wharf: though it may be that its being associated with a great deal of rottenness on the evening of our arrival has stamped it deeper in my mind. Here, again, the houses are very high, and are of an infinite variety of deformed shapes, and have (as most of the houses have) something hanging out of a great many windows, and wafting its frouzy fragrance on the breeze. Sometimes, it is a curtain; sometimes, it is a carpet; sometimes, it is a bed; sometimes, a whole line-full of clothes; but there is almost always something. Before the basements of these houses is an arcade over the pavement: very massive, dark, and low, like an old crypt. The stone, or plaster, of which it is made, has turned quite black; and against every one of these black piles, all sorts of filth and garbage seem to accumulate spontaneously. Beneath some of the arches, the sellers of macaroni and polenta establish their stalls, which are by no means inviting. The offal of the fish market, near at hand—that is to say, of a back-lane, where people sit upon the ground and on various old bulk-heads and sheds, and sell fish when they have any to dispose of—and of a vegetable market, constructed on the same principle—are contributed to the decoration of this quarter; and as all the mercantile business is transacted here, and it is crowded all day, it has a very decided flavour about it. The Porto Franco, or Free Port (where goods brought in from foreign countries pay no duty until they are sold and taken out, as in a bonded warehouse in England), is down here also; and two portentous officials, in cocked-hats, stand at the gate to search you if they choose, and to keep out Monks and Ladies. For, Sanctity as well as Beauty has been known to yield to the temptation of smuggling, and in the same way: that is to say, by concealing the smuggled property beneath the loose folds of its dress. So Sanctity and Beauty may by no means enter.

The Streets of Genoa would be all the better for the importation of a few Priests of prepossessing appearance. Every fourth or fifth man in the streets is a Priest or a Monk; and there is pretty sure to be at least one itinerant ecclesiastic inside or outside every hackney carriage on the neighbouring roads. I have no knowledge, elsewhere, of more repulsive countenances than are to be found among these gentry. If Nature's handwriting be at all legible, greater varieties of sloth, deceit, and intellectual torpor could hardly be observed among any class of men in the world.

Mr. Pepys once heard a clergyman assert in his sermon, in illustration of his respect for the Priestly office, that if he could meet a Priest and angel together, he would salute the Priest first. I am rather of the opinion of Petrarch, who, when his pupil Boccaccio wrote to him in great tribulation, that he had been visited and admonished for his writings by a Carthusian Friar who claimed to be a messenger immediately commissioned by Heaven for that purpose, replied that, for his own part, he would take the liberty of testing the reality of

the commission by personal observation of the Messenger's face, eyes, forehead, behaviour, and discourse. I cannot but believe myself, from similar observation, that many unaccredited celestial messengers may be seen skulking through the streets of Genoa, or droning away their lives in other Italian towns.

Perhaps the Cappuccini, though not a learned body, are, as an order, the best friends of the people. They seem to mingle with them more immediately, as their counsellors and comforters; and to go among them more when they are sick; and to pry less than some other orders into the secrets of families, for the purpose of establishing a baleful ascendancy over their weaker members; and to be influenced by a less fierce desire to make converts, and, once made, to let them go to ruin, soul and body. They may be seen, in their coarse dress, in all parts of the town at all times, and begging in the markets early in the morning. The Jesuits, too, muster strong in the streets, and go slinking noiselessly about, in pairs, like black cats.

In some of the narrow passages, distinct trades congregate. There is a street of jewellers, and there is a row of booksellers; but even down in places where nobody ever can, or ever could, penetrate in a carriage, there are mighty old palaces shut in among the gloomiest and closest walls, and almost shut out from the sun. Very few of the tradesmen have any idea of setting forth their goods, or disposing them for show. If you, a stranger, want to buy anything, you usually look round the shop till you see it; then clutch it, if it be within reach; and inquire how much. Everything is sold at the most unlikely place. If you want coffee, you go to a sweatmeat shop; and if you want meat, you will probably find it behind an old checked curtain, down half-a-dozen steps, in some sequestered nook as hard to find as if the commodity were poison, and Genoa's law were death to any that uttered it.

Most of the apothecaries' shops are great lounging-places. Here, grave men with sticks sit down in the shade for hours together, passing a meagre Genoa paper from hand to hand, and talking, drowsily and sparingly, about the News. Two or three of these are poor physicians, ready to proclaim themselves on an emergency, and tear off with any messenger who may arrive. You may know them by the way in which they stretch their necks to listen when you enter; and by the sigh with which they fall back again into their dull corners, on finding that you only want medicine. Few people lounge in the barbers' shops; though they are very numerous, as hardly any man shaves himself. But the apothecary's has its group of loungers, who sit back among the bottles, with their hands folded over the tops of their sticks. So still and quiet, that either you don't see them in the darkened shop, or mistake them—as I did one ghostly man in bottle-green, one day, with a hat like a stopper—for Horse Medicine.

On a summer evening the Genoese are as fond of putting themselves, as their ancestors were of putting houses, in every available inch of space within and about the town. In all the lanes and alleys, and up every little ascent, and on every dwarf wall, and on every flight of steps, they cluster like bees. Meanwhile (and especially on festa-days) the bells of the churches ring incessantly: not in peals, or any known form of sound, but in a horrible, irregular, jerking, dingle, dingle, dingle: with a sudden stop at every fifteenth dingle or so, which is maddening. This performance is usually achieved by a boy up in the steeple, who takes hold of the clapper, or a little rope attached to it, and tries to dingle louder than every other boy similarly employed. The noise is supposed to be particularly obnoxious to Evil Spirits; but looking up into the steeples, and seeing (and hearing) these young Christians thus engaged, one might very naturally mistake them for the Enemy.

Festa-days, early in the autumn, are very numerous. All the shops were shut up, twice within a week, for these holidays; and one night, all the houses in the neighbourhood of a particular church were illuminated, while the church itself was lighted outside with torches; and a grove of blazing links was erected in an open place outside one of the city gates. This part of the ceremony is prettier and more singular a little way in the country, where you can trace the illuminated cottages all the way up a steep hill-side; and where you pass festoons of tapers, wasting away in the starlight night, before some lonely little house upon the road.

On these days, they always dress the church of the saint in whose honour the festa is holden, very gaily. Gold-embroidered festoons of different colours hang from the arches; the altar furniture is set forth; and, sometimes, even the lofty pillars are swathed from top to bottom in tight-fitting draperies. The cathedral is dedicated to St. Lorenzo. On St. Lorenzo's day we went into it, just as the sun was setting. Although these decorations are usually in very indifferent taste, the effect, just then, was very superb indeed. For the whole building was dressed in red; and the sinking sun, streaming

in through a great red curtain in the chief doorway, made all the gorgeousness its own. When the sun went down, and it gradually grew quite dark inside, except for a few twinkling tapers on the principal altar, and some small dangling silver lamps, it was very mysterious and effective. But, sitting in any of the churches towards evening is like a mild dose of opium.

With the money collected at a festa, they usually pay for the dressing of the church, and for the hiring of the band, and for the tapers. If there be any left (which seldom happens, I believe), the souls in Purgatory get the benefit of it. They are also supposed to have the benefit of the exertions of certain small boys, who shake money-boxes before some mysterious little buildings like rural turnpikes, which (usually shut up close) fly open on Red-letter days, and disclose an image and some flowers inside.

Just without the city gate, on the Albaro Road, is a small house, with an altar in it, and a stationary money-box: also for the benefit of the souls in Purgatory. Still further to stimulate the charitable, there is a monstrous painting on the plaster, on either side of the grated door, representing a select party of souls frying. One of them has a grey moustache, and an elaborate head of grey hair: as if he had been taken out of a hairdresser's window and cast into the furnace. There he is: a most grotesque and hideously comic old soul: for ever blistering in the real sun, and melting in the mimic fire, for the gratification and improvement (and the contributions) of the poorer Genoese.

They are not a very joyous people, and are seldom seen to dance on their holidays: the staple places of entertainment, among the women, being the churches and the public walks. They are very good-tempered, obliging, and industrious. Industry has not made them clean, for their habitations are extremely filthy, and their usual occupation, on a fine Sunday morning, is to sit at their doors, hunting in each other's heads. But their dwellings are so close and confined that, if those parts of the city had been beaten down by Massena in the time of the terrible Blockade, it would have at least occasioned one public benefit among many misfortunes.

The Peasant Women, with naked feet and legs, are so constantly washing clothes in the public tanks, and in every stream and ditch, that one cannot help wondering, in the midst of all this dirt, who wears them when they are clean. The custom is to lay the wet linen which is being operated upon, on a smooth stone, and hammer away at it with a flat wooden mallet. This they do, as furiously as if they were revenging themselves on dress in general for being connected with the Fall of Mankind.

It is not unusual to see, lying on the edge of the tank at these times, or on another flat stone, an unfortunate baby, tightly swathed up, arms and legs and all, in an enormous quantity of wrapper, so that it is unable to move a toe or finger. This custom (which we often see represented in old pictures) is universal among the common people. A child is left anywhere without the possibility of crawling away, or is accidentally knocked off a shelf, or tumbled out of bed, or is hung up to a hook now and then, and left dangling like a doll at an English rag shop, without the least inconvenience to anybody.

I was sitting, one Sunday, soon after my arrival, in the little country church of San Martino, a couple of miles from the city, while a baptism took place. I saw the priest, and an attendant with a large taper, and a man, and a woman, and some others; but I had no more idea, until the ceremony was all over, that it was a baptism, or that the curious little stiff instrument, that was passed from one to another, in the course of the ceremony, by the handle—like a short poker—was a child, than I had that it was my own christening. I borrowed the child afterwards for a minute or two (it was lying across the font then), and found it very red in the face, but perfectly quiet, and not to be bent on any terms. The number of cripples in the streets soon ceased to surprise me.

There are plenty of Saints' and Virgin's Shrines, of course; generally at the corners of streets. The favourite memento to the Faithful, about Genoa, is a painting, representing a peasant on his knees, with a spade and some other agricultural implements beside him; and the Madonna, with the Infant Saviour in her arms, appearing to him in a cloud. This is the Legend of the Madonna della Guardia: a chapel on a mountain within a few miles, which is in high repute. It seems that this peasant lived all alone by himself, tilling some land atop of the mountain, where, being a devout man, he daily said his prayers to the Virgin in the open air; for his hut was a very poor one. Upon a certain day, the Virgin appeared to him, as in the picture, and said, "Why do you pray in the open air and without a priest?" The peasant explained because there was neither priest nor church at hand—a very uncommon complaint indeed in Italy. "I should wish, then," said the Celestial Visitor, "to have a chapel built

here, in which the prayers of the Faithful may be offered up." "But, Santissima Madonna," said the peasant, "I am a poor man; and chapels cannot be built without money. They must be supported, too, Santissima; for to have a chapel, and not support it liberally, is a wickedness—a deadly sin." This sentiment gave great satisfaction to the visitor. "Go!" said she. "There is such a village in the valley on the left, and such another village in the valley on the right, and such another village elsewhere, that will gladly contribute to the building of a chapel. Go to them! Relate what you have seen: and do not doubt that sufficient money will be forthcoming to erect my chapel, or that it will, afterwards, be handsomely maintained." All of which (miraculously) turned out to be quite true. And, in proof of this prediction and revelation, there is the chapel of the Madonna della Guardia, rich and flourishing at this day.

The splendour and variety of the Genoese churches can hardly be exaggerated. The church of the Annunciata especially: built, like many of the others, at the cost of one noble family, and now in slow progress of repair: from the outer door to the utmost height of the high cupola, is so elaborately painted and set in gold, that it looks (as SIMOND describes it, in his charming book on Italy) like a great enamelled snuff-box. Most of the richer churches contain some beautiful pictures, or other embellishments of great price, almost universally set, side by side, with sprawling effigies of maudlin monks, and the veriest trash and tinsel ever seen.

It may be a consequence of the frequent direction of the popular mind, and pocket, to the souls in Purgatory, but there is very little tenderness for the *bodies* of the dead here. For the very poor, there are, immediately outside one angle of the walls, and behind a jutting point of the fortification, near the sea, certain common pits—one for every day in the year—which all remain closed up, until the turn of each comes for its daily reception of dead bodies. Among the troops in the town, there are usually some Swiss: more or less. When any of these die, they are buried out of a fund maintained by such of their countrymen as are resident in Genoa. Their providing coffins for these men is matter of great astonishment to the authorities.

Certainly, the effect of this promiscuous and indecent splashing down of dead people into so many wells is bad. It surrounds Death with revolting associations, that insensibly become connected with those whom Death is approaching. Indifference and avoidance are the natural result; and all the softening influences of the great sorrow are harshly disturbed.

There is a ceremony, when an old Cavaliere or the like expires, of erecting a pile of benches in the cathedral, to represent his bier; covering them over with a pall of black velvet; putting his hat and sword on the top; making a little square of seats about the whole; and sending out formal invitations to his friends and acquaintance to come and sit there, and hear Mass: which is performed at the principal altar, decorated with an infinity of candles for that purpose.

When the better kind of people die, or are at the point of death, their nearest relations generally walk off: retiring into the country for a little change, and leaving the body to be disposed of, without any superintendence from them. The procession is usually formed, and the coffin borne, and the funeral conducted, by a body of persons called a Confraternita, who, as a kind of voluntary penance, undertake to perform these offices, in regular rotation, for the dead; but who, mingling something of pride with their humility, are dressed in a loose garment covering their whole person, and wear a hood concealing the face; with breathing holes and apertures for the eyes. The effect of this costume is very ghastly: especially in the case of a certain Blue Confraternita belonging to Genoa, who, to say the least of them, are very ugly customers, and who look—suddenly encountered in their pious ministration in the streets—as if they were Ghoules or Demons, bearing off the body for themselves.

Although such a custom may be liable to the abuse attendant on many Italian customs, of being recognised as a means of establishing a current account with Heaven, on which to draw, too easily, for future bad actions, or as an expiation for past misdeeds, it must be admitted to be a good one, and a practical one, and one involving unquestionably good works. A voluntary service like this is surely better than the imposed penance (not at all an infrequent one) of giving so many licks to such and such a stone in the pavement of the cathedral; or than a vow to the Madonna to wear nothing but blue for a year or two. This is supposed to give great delight above; blue being (as is well known) the Madonna's favourite colour. Women who have devoted themselves to this act of Faith are very commonly seen walking in the streets.

There are three theatres in the city, besides an old one now rarely opened. The most important—the Carlo Felice: the opera-house of

Genoa—is a very splendid, commodious, and beautiful theatre. A company of comedians were acting there when we arrived: and, after their departure, a second-rate opera-company came. The great season is not until the carnival time—in the spring. Nothing impressed me so much, in my visits here (which were pretty numerous), as the uncommonly hard and cruel character of the audience, who resent the slightest defect, take nothing good-humouredly, seem to be always lying in wait for an opportunity to hiss, and spare the actresses as little as the actors. But, as there is nothing else of a public nature at which they are allowed to express the least disapprobation, perhaps they are resolved to make the most of this opportunity.

There are a great number of Piedmontese Officers too, who are allowed the privilege of kicking their heels in the pit, for next to nothing: gratuitous or cheap accommodation for these gentlemen being insisted on by the Governor, in all public or semi-public entertainments. They are lofty critics in consequence, and infinitely more exacting than if they made the unhappy manager's fortune.

The Teatro Diurno, or Day Theatre, is a covered stage in the open air, where the performances take place by daylight, in the cool of the afternoon; commencing at four or five o'clock, and lasting some three hours. It is curious, sitting among the audience, to have a fine view of the neighbouring hills and houses, and to see the neighbours at their windows looking on, and to hear the bells of the churches and convents ringing at most complete cross purposes with the scene. Beyond this, and the novelty of seeing a play in the fresh pleasant air, with the darkening evening closing in, there is nothing very exciting or characteristic in the performances. The actors are indifferent; and though they sometimes represent one of Goldoni's comedies, the staple of the Drama is French. Anything like nationality is dangerous to despotic governments and Jesuit-beleaguered kings.

The Theatre of Puppets, or Marionetti—a famous company from Milan—is, without any exception, the drollest exhibition I ever beheld in my life. I never saw anything so exquisitely ridiculous. They *look* between four and five feet high, but are really much smaller; for when a musician in the orchestra happens to put his hat on the stage, it becomes alarmingly gigantic, and almost blots out an actor. They usually play a comedy and a ballet. The comic man in the comedy I saw one summer night is a waiter at an hotel. There never was such a locomotive actor since the world began. Great pains are taken with him. He has extra joints in his legs: and a practical eye, with which he winks at the pit, in a manner that is absolutely insupportable to a stranger, but which the initiated audience, mainly composed of the common people, receive (so they do everything else) quite as a matter of course, and as if he were a man. His spirits are prodigious. He continually shakes his legs, and winks his eye. And there is a heavy father with grey hair, who sits down on the regular conventional stage-bank, and blesses his daughter in the regular conventional way, who is tremendous. No one would suppose it possible that anything short of a real man could be so tedious. It is the triumph of art.

In the Ballet, an Enchanter runs away with the Bride in the very hour of her nuptials. He brings her to his cave, and tries to soothe her. They sit down on a sofa (the regular sofa! in the regular place, O.P. Second Entrance!), and a procession of musicians enter; one creature playing a drum, and knocking himself off his legs at every blow. These failing to delight her, dancers appear. Four first; then two; *the* two; the flesh-coloured two. The way in which they dance; the height to which they spring; the impossible and inhuman extent to which they pirouette; the revelation of their preposterous legs; the coming down with a pause, on the very tips of their toes, when the music requires it; the gentleman's retiring up when it is the lady's turn; and the lady's retiring up when it is the gentleman's turn; the final passion of a pas de deux; and the going off with a bound!—I shall never see a real ballet with a composed countenance again.

I went, another night, to see these Puppets act a play called "St. Helena, or the Death of Napoleon." It began by the disclosure of Napoleon, with an immense head, seated on a sofa in his chamber at St. Helena: to whom his valet entered, with this obscure announcement:

"Sir Yew ud se on Low!" (the *ow* as in cow).

Sir Hudson (that you could have seen his regimentals!) was a perfect mammoth of a man to Napoleon; hideously ugly; with a monstrously disproportionate face, and a great clump for the lower jaw, to express his tyrannical and obdurate nature. He began his system of persecution by calling his prisoner "General Buonaparte;" to which the latter replied, with the deepest tragedy, "Sir Yew ud se on Low, call me not thus. Repeat that

phrase and leave me! I am Napoleon, Emperor of France!" Sir Yew ud se on, nothing daunted, proceeded to entertain him with an ordinance of the British Government, regulating the state he should preserve, and the furniture of his rooms: and limiting his attendants to four or five persons. "Four or five for *me!*" said Napoleon. "Me! One hundred thousand men were lately at my sole command; and this English officer talks of four or five for *me!*" Throughout the piece, Napoleon (who talked very like the real Napoleon, and was for ever having small soliloquies by himself) was very bitter on "these English officers" and "these English soldiers:" to the great satisfaction of the audience, who were perfectly delighted to have Low bullied; and who, whenever Low said "General Buonaparte" (which he always did: always receiving the same correction), quite execrated him. It would be hard to say why; for Italians have little cause to sympathise with Napoleon, Heaven knows.

There was no plot at all, except that a French officer, disguised as an Englishman, came to propound a plan of escape; and being discovered, but not before Napoleon had magnanimously refused to steal his freedom, was immediately ordered off by Low to be hanged. In two very long speeches, which Low made memorable by winding up with "Yas!"—to show that he was English—which brought down thunders of applause. Napoleon was so affected by this catastrophe, that he fainted away on the spot, and was carried out by two other puppets. Judging from what followed, it would appear that he never recovered the shock; for the next act showed him, in a clean shirt, in his bed (curtains crimson and white), where a lady, prematurely dressed in mourning, brought two little children, who kneeled down by the bedside, while he made a decent end; the last word on his lips being "Vatterlo."

It was unspeakably ludicrous. Buonaparte's boots were so wonderfully beyond control, and did such marvellous things of their own accord: doubling themselves up, and getting under tables, and dangling in the air, and sometimes skating away with him, out of all human knowledge, when he was in full speech—mischances which were not rendered the less absurd by a settled melancholy depicted in his face. To put an end to one conference with Low, he had to go to a table, and read a book: when it was the finest spectacle I ever beheld, to see his body bending over the volume like a bootjack, and his sentimental eyes glaring obstinately into the pit. He was prodigiously good in bed, with an immense collar to his shirt, and his little hands outside the coverlet. So was Dr. Antommarchi, represented by a puppet with long lank hair, like Mawworm's, who, in consequence of some derangement of his wires, hovered about the couch like a vulture, and gave medical opinions in the air. He was almost as good as Low, though the latter was great at all times—a decided brute and villain, beyond all possibility of mistake. Low was especially fine at the last, when, hearing the doctor and the valet say, "The Emperor is dead!" he pulled out his watch, and wound up the piece (not the watch) by exclaiming, with characteristic brutality, "Ha! ha! Eleven minutes to six! The General dead! and the spy hanged!" This brought the curtain down triumphantly.

There is not in Italy, they say (and I believe them), a lovelier residence than the Palazzo Peschiere, or Palace of the Fish-ponds, whither we removed as soon as our three months' tenancy of the Pink Gaol at Albaro had ceased and determined.

It stands on a height within the walls of Genoa, but aloof from the town: surrounded by beautiful gardens of its own, adorned with statues, vases, fountains, marble basins, terraces, walks of orange-trees and lemon-trees, groves of roses and camellias. All its apartments are beautiful in their proportions and decorations; but the great hall, some fifty feet in height, with three large windows at the end, overlooking the whole town of Genoa, the harbour, and the neighbouring sea, affords one of the most fascinating and delightful prospects in the world. Any house more cheerful and habitable than the great rooms are, within, it would be difficult to conceive; and certainly nothing more delicious than the scene without, in sunshine or in moonlight, could be imagined. It is more like an enchanted palace in an Eastern story than a grave and sober lodging.

How you may wander on, from room to room, and never tire of the wild fancies on the walls and ceilings, as bright in their fresh colouring as if they had been painted yesterday; or how one floor, or even the great hall which opens on eight other rooms, is a spacious promenade; or how there are corridors and bedchambers above, which we never use and rarely visit, and scarcely know the way through; or how there is a view of a perfectly different character on each of the four sides of the building; matters little. But that prospect from the hall is like a vision to me. I go back to it in fancy, as I have done

in calm reality a hundred times a day; and stand there, looking out, with the sweet scents from the garden rising up about me, in a perfect dream of happiness.

There lies all Genoa, in beautiful confusion, with its many churches, monasteries, and convents, pointing up into the sunny sky; and down below me, just where the roofs begin, a solitary convent parapet, fashioned like a gallery, with an iron cross at the end, where sometimes, early in the morning, I have seen a little group of dark-veiled nuns gliding sorrowfully to and fro, and stopping now and then to peep down upon the waking world in which they have no part. Old Monte Faccio, brightest of hills in good weather, but sulkiest when storms are coming on, is here, upon the left. The Fort within the walls (the good King built it to command the town, and beat the houses of the Genoese about their ears, in case they should be discontented) commands that height upon the right. The broad sea lies beyond, in front there; and that line of coast, beginning by the lighthouse, and tapering away, a mere speck in the rosy distance, is the beautiful coast road that leads to Nice. The garden near at hand, among the roofs and houses: all red with roses and fresh with little fountains: is the Acqua Sola—a public promenade, where the military band plays gaily, and the white veils cluster thick, and the Genoese nobility ride round, and round, and round, in state clothes and coaches at least, if not in absolute wisdom. Within a stone's throw, as it seems, the audience of the Day Theatre sit: their faces turned this way. But, as the stage is hidden, it is very odd, without a knowledge of the cause, to see their faces change so suddenly from earnestness to laughter; and odder still to hear the rounds upon rounds of applause, rattling in the evening air, to which the curtain falls. But, being Sunday night, they act their best and most attractive play. And now the sun is going down, in such magnificent array of red, and green, and golden light, as neither pen nor pencil could depict; and to the ringing of the vesper bells, darkness sets in at once, without a twilight. Then, lights begin to shine in Genoa, and on the country road; and the revolving lantern out at sea there, flashing, for an instant, on this palace front and portico, illuminates it as if there were a bright moon bursting from behind a cloud; then, merges it in deep obscurity. And this, so far as I know, is the only reason why the Genoese avoid it after dark, and think it haunted.

My memory will haunt it, many nights, in time to come; but nothing worse, I will engage. The same Ghost will occasionally sail away, as I did one pleasant autumn evening, into, the bright prospect, and snuff the morning air at Marseilles.

The corpulent hairdresser was still sitting in his slippers outside his shop-door there, but the twirling ladies in the window, with the natural inconstancy of their sex, had ceased to twirl, and were languishing, stock-still, with their beautiful faces addressed to blind corners of the establishment, where it was impossible for admirers to penetrate.

The steamer had come from Genoa in a delicious run of eighteen hours, and we were going to run back again by the Cornice Road from Nice; not being satisfied to have seen only the outsides of the beautiful towns that rise in picturesque white clusters from among the olive woods, and rocks, and hills, upon the margin of the Sea.

The boat which started for Nice that night, at eight o'clock, was very small, and so crowded with goods that there was scarcely room to move; neither was there anything to eat on board, except bread; nor to drink, except coffee. But, being due at Nice at about eight or so in the morning, this was of no consequence: so when we began to wink at the bright stars, in involuntary acknowledgment of their winking at us, we turned into our berths, in a crowded, but cool little cabin, and slept soundly till morning.

The boat being as dull and dogged a little boat as ever was built, it was within an hour of noon when we turned into Nice Harbour, where we very little expected anything but breakfast. But we were laden with wool. Wool must not remain in the Custom House at Marseilles more than twelve months at a stretch, without paying duty. It is the custom to make fictitious removals of unsold wool to evade this law; to take it somewhere when the twelve months are nearly out; bring it straight back again; and warehouse it, as a new cargo, for nearly twelve months longer. This wool of ours had come originally from some place in the East. It was recognised as Eastern produce, the moment we entered the harbour. Accordingly, the gay little Sunday boats, full of holiday people, which had come off to greet us, were warned away by the authorities; we were declared in quarantine; and a great flag was solemnly run up to the masthead on the wharf, to make it known to all the town.

It was a very hot day indeed. We were unshaved, unwashed, undressed, unfed, and could hardly enjoy the absurdity of lying blistering in

a lazy harbour, with the town looking on from a respectful distance, all manner of whiskered men in cocked-hats discussing our fate at a remote guard-house, with gestures (we looked very hard at them through telescopes) expressive of a week's detention at least: and nothing whatever the matter all the time. But even in this crisis the Brave Courier achieved a triumph. He telegraphed somebody (*I* saw nobody) either naturally connected with the hotel, or put *en rapport* with the establishment for that occasion only. The telegraph was answered, and in half an hour, or less, there came a loud shout from the guard-house. The captain was wanted. Everybody helped the captain into his boat. Everybody got his luggage, and said we were going. The captain rowed away, and disappeared behind a little jutting corner of the Galley-slaves' Prison: and presently came back with something, very sulkily. The Brave Courier met him at the side, and received the something as its rightful owner. It was a wicker basket, folded in a linen cloth; and in it were two great bottles of wine, a roast fowl, some salt fish chopped with garlic, a great loaf of bread, a dozen or so of peaches, and a few other trifles. When we had selected our own breakfast, the Brave Courier invited a chosen party to partake of these refreshments, and assured them that they need not be deterred by motives of delicacy, as he would order a second basket to be furnished at their expense. Which he did—no one knew how—and by-and-by, the captain being again summoned, again sulkily returned with another something; over which my popular attendant presided as before: carving with a clasp-knife, his own personal property, something smaller than a Roman sword.

The whole party on board were made merry by these unexpected supplies; but none more so than a loquacious little Frenchman, who got drunk in five minutes, and a sturdy Cappuccino Friar, who had taken everybody's fancy mightily, and was one of the best friars in the world, I verily believe.

He had a free, open countenance; and a rich brown, flowing beard; and was a remarkably handsome man, of about fifty. He had come up to us early in the morning, and inquired whether we were sure to be at Nice by eleven; saying that he particularly wanted to know, because, if we reached it by that time, he would have to perform Mass, and must deal with the consecrated wafer, fasting; whereas, if there were no chance of his being in time, he would immediately breakfast. He made this communication under the idea that the Brave Courier was the captain; and, indeed, he looked much more like it than anybody else on board. Being assured that we should arrive in good time, he fasted, and talked, fasting, to everybody, with the most charming good-humour; answering jokes at the expense of friars with other jokes at the expense of laymen, and saying that, friar as he was, he would engage to take up the two strongest men on board, one after the other, with his teeth, and carry them along the deck. Nobody gave him the opportunity, but I dare say he could have done it; for he was a gallant, noble figure of a man, even in the Cappuccino dress, which is the ugliest and most ungainly that can well be.

All this had given great delight to the loquacious Frenchman, who gradually patronised the Friar very much, and seemed to commiserate him, as one who might have been born a Frenchman himself, but for an unfortunate destiny. Although his patronage was such as a mouse might bestow upon a lion, he had a vast opinion of its condescension; and, in the warmth of that sentiment, occasionally rose on tiptoe, to slap the Friar on the back.

When the baskets arrived: it being then too late for Mass: the Friar went to work bravely; eating prodigiously of the cold meat and bread, drinking deep draughts of the wine, smoking cigars, taking snuff, sustaining an uninterrupted conversation with all hands, and occasionally running to the boat's side, and hailing somebody on shore with the intelligence that we *must* be got out of this quarantine somehow or other, as he had to take part in a great religious procession in the afternoon. After this, he would come back, laughing lustily from pure good-humour: while the Frenchman wrinkled his small face into ten thousand creases, and said how droll it was, and what a brave boy was that Friar! At length the heat of the sun without, and of the wine within, made the Frenchman sleepy. So, in the noontide of his patronage of his gigantic protégé, he lay down among the wool, and began to snore.

It was four o'clock before we were released; and the Frenchman, dirty, and woolly, and snuffy, was still sleeping when the Friar went ashore. As soon as we were free, we all hurried away to wash and dress, that we might make a decent appearance at the procession; and I saw no more of the Frenchman until we took up our station in the main street to see it pass, when he squeezed himself into a front place, elaborately renovated; threw back his little coat, to show a broad-barred velvet waistcoat, sprinkled all over with stars; and adjusted himself and his cane so

as utterly to bewilder and transfix the Friar, when he should appear.

The procession was a very long one, and included an immense number of people divided into small parties; each party chanting nasally, on its own account, without reference to any other, and producing a most dismal result. There were angels, crosses, Virgins carried on flat boards surrounded by Cupids, crowns, saints, missals, infantry, tapers, monks, nuns, relics, dignitaries of the church in green hats, walking under crimson parasols: and, here and there, a species of sacred street lamp hoisted on a pole. We looked out anxiously for the Cappuccini, and presently their brown robes and corded girdles were seen coming on in a body.

I observed the little Frenchman chuckle over the idea that when the Friar saw him in the broad-barred waistcoat, he would mentally exclaim, "Is that my Patron? *That* distinguished man?" and would be covered with confusion. Ah! never was the Frenchman so deceived. As our friend the Cappuccino advanced, with folded arms, he looked straight into the visage of the little Frenchman, with a bland, serene, composed abstraction, not to be described. There was not the faintest trace of recognition or amusement on his features; not the smallest consciousness of bread and meat, wine, snuff, or cigars. "C'est lui-même," I heard the little Frenchman say, in some doubt. Oh yes, it was himself. It was not his brother or his nephew, very like him. It was he. He walked in great state: being one of the Superiors of the Order: and looked his part to admiration. There never was anything so perfect of its kind as the contemplative way in which he allowed his placid gaze to rest on us, his late companions, as if he had never seen us in his life, and didn't see us then. The Frenchman, quite humbled, took off his hat at last, but the Friar still passed on, with the same imperturbable serenity; and the broad-barred waistcoat, fading into the crowd, was seen no more.

The procession wound up with a discharge of musketry that shook all the windows in the town. Next afternoon we started for Genoa by the famed Cornice Road.

The half-French, half-Italian Vetturino, who undertook, with his little rattling carriage and pair, to convey us thither in three days, was a careless, good-looking fellow, whose lightheartedness and singing propensities knew no bounds as long as we went on smoothly. So long, he had a word and a smile, and a flick of his whip, for all the peasant girls, and odds and ends of the *Sonnambula* for all the echoes. So long, he went jingling through every little village, with bells on his horses and rings in his ears: a very meteor of gallantry and cheerfulness. But, it was highly characteristic to see him under a slight reverse of circumstances, when, in one part of the journey, we came to a narrow place where a waggon had broken down and stopped up the road. His hands were twined in his hair immediately, as if a combination of all the direst accidents in life had suddenly fallen on his devoted head. He swore in French, prayed in Italian, and went up and down, beating his feet on the ground in a very ecstasy of despair. There were various carters and mule-drivers assembled round the broken waggon, and at last some man, of an original turn of mind, proposed that a general and joint effort should be made to get things to rights again, and clear the way—an idea which, I verily believe, would never have presented itself to our friend, though we had remained there until now. It was done at no great cost of labour; but at every pause in the doing, his hands were wound in his hair again, as if there were no ray of hope to lighten his misery. The moment he was on his box once more, and clattering briskly downhill, he returned to the *Sonnambula* and the peasant girls, as if it were not in the power of misfortune to depress him.

Much of the romance of the beautiful towns and villages on this beautiful road disappears when they are entered, for many of them are very miserable. The streets are narrow, dark, and dirty; the inhabitants lean and squalid; and the withered old women, with their wiry grey hair twisted up into a knot on the top of the head, like a pad to carry loads on, are so intensely ugly, both along the Riviera, and in Genoa too, that, seen straggling about in dim doorways with their spindles, or crooning together in by-corners, they are like a population of Witches—except that they certainly are not to be suspected of brooms or any other instrument of cleanliness. Neither are the pig-skins, in common use to hold wine, and hung out in the sun in all directions, by any means ornamental, as they always preserve the form of very bloated pigs, with their heads and legs cut off, dangling upside down by their own tails.

These towns, as they are seen in the approach, however: nestling, with their clustering roofs and towers, among trees on steep hillsides, or built upon the brink of noble bays: are charming. The vegetation is everywhere luxuriant and beautiful, and the Palm-tree makes a novel feature in the novel scenery. In

one town, San Remo—a most extraordinary place, built on gloomy open arches, so that one might ramble underneath the whole town—there are pretty terrace gardens; in other towns there is the clang of shipwrights' hammers, and the building of small vessels on the beach. In some of the broad bays the fleets of Europe might ride at anchor. In every case, each little group of houses presents, in the distance, some enchanting confusion of picturesque and fanciful shapes.

The road itself, now high above the glittering sea, which breaks against the foot of the precipice: now turning inland to sweep the shore of a bay: now crossing the stony bed of a mountain stream: now low down on the beach: now winding among riven rocks of many forms and colours: now chequered by a solitary ruined tower, one of a chain of towers built, in old time, to protect the coast from the invasions of the Barbary Corsairs—presents new beauties every moment. When its own striking scenery is passed, and it trails on through a long line of suburb, lying on the flat seashore, to Genoa, then the changing glimpses of that noble city and its harbour awaken a new source of interest; freshened by every huge, unwieldy, half-inhabited old house in its outskirts: and coming to its climax when the city gate is reached, and all Genoa, with its beautiful harbour and neighbouring hills, bursts proudly on the view.

TO PARMA, MODENA, AND BOLOGNA.

I STROLLED away from Genoa on the sixth of November, bound for a good many places (England among them), but first for Piacenza; for which town I started in the coupé of a machine something like a travelling caravan, in company with the Brave Courier, and a lady with a large dog, who howled dolefully, at intervals, all night. It was very wet, and very cold; very dark, and very dismal; we travelled at the rate of barely four miles an hour, and stopped nowhere for refreshment. At ten o'clock next morning we changed coaches at Alessandria, where we were packed up in another coach (the body whereof would have been small for a fly), in company with a very old priest; a young Jesuit, his companion—who carried their breviaries and other books, and who, in the exertion of getting into the coach, had made a gash of pink leg between his black stocking and his black knee-shorts, that reminded one of Hamlet in Ophelia's closet, only it was visible on both legs—a provincial Avvocato; and a gentleman with a red nose that had an uncommon and singular sheen upon it, which I never observed in the human subject before. In this way we travelled on until four o'clock in the afternoon: the roads being still very heavy, and the coach very slow. To mend the matter, the old priest was troubled with cramps in his legs, so that he had to give a terrible yell every ten minutes or so, and be hoisted out by the united efforts of the company; the coach always stopping for him with great gravity. This disorder, and the roads, formed the main subject of conversation. Finding, in the afternoon, that the coupé had discharged two people, and had only one passenger inside—a monstrous ugly Tuscan, with a great purple moustache, of which no man could see the ends when he had his hat on—I took advantage of its better accommodation, and, in company with this gentleman (who was very conversational and good-humoured), travelled on until nearly eleven o'clock at night, when the driver reported that he couldn't think of going any farther, and we accordingly made a halt at a place called Stradella.

The inn was a series of strange galleries surrounding a yard; where our coach, and a waggon or two, and a lot of fowls and fire-wood, were all heaped up together, higgledy-piggledy; so that you didn't know, and couldn't have taken your oath, which was a fowl and which was a cart. We followed a sleepy man with a flaring torch into a great, cold room, where there were two immensely broad beds, on what looked like two immensely broad deal dining-tables; another deal table of similar dimensions in the middle of the bare floor; four windows; and two chairs. Somebody said it was my room; and I walked up and down it for half an hour or so, staring at the Tuscan, the old priest, the young priest, and the Avvocato (Red Nose lived in the town, and had gone home), who sat upon the beds, and stared at me in return.

The rather dreary whimsicality of this stage of the proceedings is interrupted by an announcement from the Brave (he has been cooking) that supper is ready; and to the priest's chamber (the next room, and the counterpart of mine) we all adjourn. The first dish is a cabbage, boiled with a great quantity of rice in a tureen full of water, and flavoured with cheese. It is so hot, and we are so cold, that it appears almost jolly. The second dish is some little bits of pork, fried with pigs' kidneys. The third,

two red fowls. The fourth, two little red turkeys. The fifth, a huge stew of garlic and truffles, and I don't know what else; and this concludes the entertainment.

Before I can sit down in my own chamber, and think it of the dampest, the door opens, and the Brave comes moving in, in the middle of such a quantity of fuel that he looks like Birnam Wood taking a winter walk. He kindles this heap in a twinkling, and produces a jorum of hot brandy-and-water; for that bottle of his keeps company with the seasons, and now holds nothing but the purest *eau de vie*. When he has accomplished this feat, he retires for the night; and I hear him, for an hour afterwards, and, indeed, until I fall asleep, making jokes in some outhouse (apparently under the pillow), where he is smoking cigars with a party of confidential friends. He never was in the house in his life before: but he knows everybody everywhere, before he has been anywhere five minutes; and is certain to have attracted to himself, in the meantime, the enthusiastic devotion of the whole establishment.

This is at twelve o'clock at night. At four o'clock next morning he is up again, fresher than a new-blown rose; making blazing fires without the least authority from the landlord; producing mugs of scalding coffee when nobody else can get anything but cold water; and going out into the dark streets, and roaring for fresh milk, on the chance of somebody with a cow getting up to supply it. While the horses are "coming," I stumble out into the town too. It seems to be all one little Piazza, with a cold damp wind blowing in and out of the arches, alternately, in a sort of pattern. But it is profoundly dark, and raining heavily; and I shouldn't know it to-morrow, if I were taken there to try. Which Heaven forbid!

The horses arrive in about an hour. In the interval the driver swears: sometimes Christian oaths, sometimes Pagan oaths. Sometimes, when it is a long compound oath, he begins with Christianity and merges into Paganism. Various messengers are dispatched; not so much after the horses, as after each other; for the first messenger never comes back, and all the rest imitate him. At length the horses appear, surrounded by all the messengers; some kicking them, and some dragging them, and all shouting abuse to them. Then the old priest, the young priest, the Avvocato, the Tuscan, and all of us take our places; and sleepy voices, proceeding from the doors of extraordinary hutches in divers parts of the yard, cry out "Addio, corriere mio! Buon' viaggio, corriere!" Salutations which the Courier, with his face one monstrous grin, returns in like manner as we go jolting and wallowing away through the mud.

At Piacenza, which was four or five hours' journey from the inn at Stradella, we broke up our little company before the hotel door, with divers manifestations of friendly feeling on all sides. The old priest was taken with the cramp again, before he had got half-way down the street; and the young priest laid the bundle of books on a door-step, while he dutifully rubbed the old gentleman's legs. The client of the Avvocato was waiting for him at the yard-gate, and kissed him on each cheek with such a resounding smack, that I am afraid he had either a very bad case, or a scantily-furnished purse. The Tuscan, with a cigar in his mouth, went loitering off, carrying his hat in his hand that he might the better trail up the ends of his dishevelled moustache. And the Brave Courier, as he and I strolled away to look about us, began immediately to entertain me with the private histories and family affairs of the whole party.

A brown, decayed old town Piacenza is. A deserted, solitary, grass-grown place, with ruined ramparts; half-filled-up trenches, which afford a frouzy pasturage to the lean kine that wander about them; and streets of stern houses, moodily frowning at the other houses over the way. The sleepiest and shabbiest of soldiery go wandering about, with the double curse of laziness and poverty, uncouthly wrinkling their misfitting regimentals; the dirtiest of children play with their impromptu toys (pigs and mud) in the feeblest of gutters; and the gauntest of dogs trot in and out of the dullest of archways, in perpetual search of something to eat, which they never seem to find. A mysterious and solemn Palace, guarded by two colossal statues, twin Genii of the place, stands gravely in the midst of the idle town; and the king with the marble legs, who flourished in the time of the thousand and one Nights, might live contentedly inside of it, and never have the energy, in his upper half of flesh and blood, to want to come out.

What a strange, half-sorrowful, and half-delicious doze it is to ramble through these places gone to sleep and basking in the sun! Each, in its turn, appears to be, of all the mouldy, dreary, God-forgotten towns in the wide world, the chief. Sitting on this hillock where a bastion used to be, and where a noisy fortress was, in the time of the old Roman station here, I become aware that I have never known till now what it is to be lazy. A dormouse must surely be in very much the same condition before he

retires under the wool in his cage ; or a tortoise before he buries himself. I feel that I am getting rusty. That any attempt to think would be accompanied with a creaking noise. That there is nothing, anywhere, to be done, or needing to be done. That there is no more human progress, motion, effort, or advancement of any kind beyond this. That the whole scheme stopped here centuries ago, and lay down to rest until the Day of Judgment.

Never while the Brave Courier lives! Behold him jingling out of Piacenza, and stagger-

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

ing this way, in the tallest posting-chaise ever seen, so that he looks out of the front window as if he were peeping over a garden wall ; while the postillion, concentrated essence of all the shabbiness of Italy, pauses for a moment in his animated conversation, to touch his hat to a blunt-nosed little Virgin, hardly less shabby than himself, enshrined in a plaster Punch's show outside the town.

In Genoa, and thereabouts, they train the vines on trellis-work, supported on square clumsy pillars, which, in themselves, are anything but

picturesque. But here they twine them around trees, and let them trail among the hedges; and the vineyards are full of trees, regularly planted for this purpose, each with its own vine twining and clustering about it. Their leaves are now of the brightest gold and deepest red; and never was anything so enchantingly graceful and full of beauty. Through miles of these delightful forms and colours the road winds its way. The wild festoons, the elegant wreaths, and crowns, and garlands of all shapes; the fairy nets flung over great trees, and making them prisoners in sport; the tumbled heaps and mounds of exquisite shapes upon the ground; how rich and beautiful they are! And every now and then a long, long line of trees will be all bound and garlanded together: as if they had taken hold of one another, and were coming dancing down the field!

Parma has cheerful, stirring streets for an Italian town; and consequently is not so characteristic as many places of less note. Always excepting the retired Piazza, where the Cathedral, Baptistery, and Campanile—ancient buildings, of a sombre brown, embellished with innumerable grotesque monsters and dreamy-looking creatures carved in marble and red stone—are clustered in a noble and magnificent repose. Their silent presence was only invaded, when I saw them, by the twittering of the many birds that were flying in and out of the crevices in the stones, and little nooks in the architecture, where they had made their nests. They were busy, rising from the cold shade of Temples made with hands into the sunny air of Heaven. Not so the worshippers within, who were listening to the same drowsy chant, or kneeling before the same kinds of images and tapers, or whispering with their heads bowed down, in the very self-same dark confessionals as I had left in Genoa and everywhere else.

The decayed and mutilated paintings with which this church is covered have, to my thinking, a remarkably mournful and depressing influence. It is miserable to see great works of art—something of the Souls of Painters—perishing and fading away, like human forms. This cathedral is odorous with the rotting of Correggio's frescoes in the Cupola. Heaven knows how beautiful they may have been at one time. Connoisseurs fall into raptures with them now; but such a labyrinth of arms and legs: such heaps of foreshortened limbs, entangled and involved and jumbled together: no operative surgeon, gone mad, could imagine in his wildest delirium.

There is a very interesting subterranean church here; the roof supported by marble pillars, behind each of which there seemed to be at least one beggar in ambush: to say nothing of the tombs and secluded altars. From every one of these lurking-places, such crowds of phantom-looking men and women, leading other men and women with twisted limbs, or chattering jaws, or paralytic gestures, or idiotic heads, or some other sad infirmity, came hobbling out to beg, that if the ruined frescoes in the cathedral above had been suddenly animated, and had retired to this lower church, they could hardly have made a greater confusion, or exhibited a more confounding display of arms and legs.

There is Petrarch's Monument, too; and there is the Baptistery, with its beautiful arches and immense font; and there is a gallery containing some very remarkable pictures, whereof a few were being copied by hairy-faced artists, with little velvet caps more off their heads than on. There is the Farnese Palace, too; and in it one of the dreariest spectacles of decay that ever was seen—a grand, old, gloomy theatre mouldering away.

It is a large wooden structure, of the horse-shoe shape; the lower seats arranged upon the Roman plan, but above them, great heavy chambers rather than boxes, where the Nobles sat, remote, in their proud state. Such desolation as has fallen on this theatre, enhanced in the spectator's fancy by its gay intention and design, none but worms can be familiar with. A hundred and ten years have passed since any play was acted here. The sky shines in through the gashes in the roof; the boxes are dropping down, wasting away, and only tenanted by rats; damp and mildew smear the faded colours, and make spectral maps upon the panels; lean rags are dangling down where there were gay festoons on the Proscenium; the stage has rotted so, that a narrow wooden gallery is thrown across it, or it would sink beneath the tread, and bury the visitor in the gloomy depth beneath. The desolation and decay impress themselves on all the senses. The air has a mouldering smell, and an earthy taste; any stray outer sounds that straggle in with some lost sunbeam are muffled and heavy; and the worm, the maggot, and the rot have changed the surface of the wood beneath the touch, as time will seam and roughen a smooth hand. If ever Ghosts act plays, they act them on this ghostly stage.

It was most delicious weather when we came into Modena, where the darkness of the sombre colonnades over the footways skirting the main street on either side was made refreshing and agreeable by the bright sky, so wonderfully blue.

I passed from all the glory of the day into a dim cathedral, where high mass was performing, feeble tapers were burning, people were kneeling in all directions before all manner of shrines, and officiating priests were crooning the usual chant, in the usual low, dull, drawling, melancholy tone.

Thinking how strange it was to find, in every stagnant town, this same Heart beating with the same monotonous pulsation, the centre of the same torpid, listless system, I came out by another door, and was suddenly scared to death by a blast from the shrillest trumpet that ever was blown. Immediately came tearing round the corner an equestrian company from Paris: marshalling themselves under the walls of the church, and flouting, with their horses' heels, the griffins, lions, tigers, and other monsters in stone and marble, decorating its exterior. First, there came a stately nobleman with a great deal of hair, and no hat, bearing an enormous banner, on which was inscribed, MAZEPPA! TO-NIGHT! Then, a Mexican chief, with a great pear-shaped club on his shoulder, like Hercules. Then, six or eight Roman chariots: each with a beautiful lady in extremely short petticoats, and unnaturally pink tights, erect within: shedding beaming looks upon the crowd, in which there was a latent expression of discomposure and anxiety, for which I couldn't account, until, as the open back of each chariot presented itself, I saw the immense difficulty with which the pink legs maintained their perpendicular, over the uneven pavement of the town: which gave me quite a new idea of the ancient Romans and Britons. The procession was brought to a close by some dozen indomitable warriors of different nations, riding two and two, and haughtily surveying the tame population of Modena: among whom, however, they occasionally condescended to scatter largesse in the form of a few handbills. After caracoling among the lions and tigers, and proclaiming that evening's entertainments with blast of trumpet, it then filed off by the other end of the square, and left a new and greatly increased dulness behind.

When the procession had so entirely passed away that the shrill trumpet was mild in the distance, and the tail of the last horse was hopelessly round the corner, the people who had come out of the church to stare at it, went back again. But one old lady, kneeling on the pavement within, near the door, had seen it all, and had been immensely interested, without getting up; and this old lady's eye, at that juncture, I happened to catch: to our mutual confusion. She cut our embarrassment very short, however, by crossing herself devoutly, and going down, at full length, on her face, before a figure in a fancy petticoat and a gilt crown; which was so like one of the procession figures, that perhaps at this hour she may think the whole appearance a celestial vision. Anyhow, I must certainly have forgiven her her interest in the Circus, though I had been her Father Confessor.

There was a little fiery-eyed old man with a crooked shoulder, in the cathedral, who took it very ill that I made no effort to see the bucket (kept in an old tower) which the people of Modena took away from the people of Bologna in the fourteenth century, and about which there was war made and a mock-heroic poem by TASSONE, too. Being quite content, however, to look at the outside of the tower, and feast, in imagination, on the bucket within; and preferring to loiter in the shade of the tall Campanile, and about the cathedral; I have no personal knowledge of this bucket, even at the present time.

Indeed, we were at Bologna before the little old man (or the Guide Book) would have considered that we had half done justice to the wonders of Modena. But it is such a delight to me to leave new scenes behind, and still go on, encountering newer scenes—and, moreover, I have such a perverse disposition in respect of sights that are cut, and dried, and dictated—that I fear I sin against similar authorities in every place I visit.

Be this as it may, in the pleasant Cemetery at Bologna I found myself walking next Sunday morning, among the stately marble tombs and colonnades, in company with a crowd of Peasants, and escorted by a little Cicerone of that town, who was excessively anxious for the honour of the place, and most solicitous to divert my attention from the bad monuments: whereas he was never tired of extolling the good ones. Seeing this little man (a good-humoured little man he was, who seemed to have nothing in his face but shining teeth and eyes) looking, wistfully, at a certain plot of grass, I asked him who was buried there. "'The poor people, Signore," he said with a shrug and a smile, and stopping to look back at me—for he always went on a little before, and took off his hat to introduce every new monument. "Only the poor, Signore! It's very cheerful. It's very lively. How green it is, how cool! It's like a meadow! There are five,"—holding up all the fingers of his right hand to express the number, which an Italian peasant will always do, if it be within the compass of his ten fingers,—"there are five of my little children buried there, Signore; just

there; a little to the right. Well! Thanks to God! It's very cheerful. How green it is! How cool it is! It's quite a meadow!"

He looked me very hard in the face, and seeing I was sorry for him, took a pinch of snuff (every Cicerone takes snuff), and made a little bow; partly in deprecation of his having alluded to such a subject, and partly in memory of the children and of his favourite saint. It was as unaffected and as perfectly natural a little bow as ever man made. Immediately afterwards, he took his hat off altogether, and begged to introduce me to the next monument; and his eyes and his teeth shone brighter than before.

THROUGH BOLOGNA AND FERRARA.

THERE was such a very smart official in attendance at the Cemetery where the little Cicerone had buried his children, that when the little Cicerone suggested to me, in a whisper, that there would be no offence in presenting this officer, in return for some slight extra service, with a couple of pauls (about tenpence, English money), I looked incredulously at his cocked-hat, wash-leather gloves, well-made uniform, and dazzling buttons, and rebuked the little Cicerone with a grave shake of the head. For, in splendour of appearance, he was at least equal to the Deputy Usher of the Black Rod; and the idea of his carrying, as Jeremy Diddler would say, "such a thing as tenpence" away with him seemed monstrous. He took it in excellent part, however, when I made bold to give it him, and pulled off his cocked-hat with a flourish that would have been a bargain at double the money.

It seemed to be his duty to describe the monuments to the people—at all events he was doing so; and when I compared him, like Gulliver in Brobdingnag, "with the Institutions of my own beloved country, I could not refrain from tears of pride and exultation." He had no pace at all; no more than a tortoise. He loitered as the people loitered, that they might gratify their curiosity; and positively allowed them, now and then, to read the inscriptions on the tombs. He was neither shabby, nor insolent, nor churlish, nor ignorant. He spoke his own language with perfect propriety, and seemed to consider himself, in his way, a kind of teacher of the people, and to entertain a just respect both for himself and them. They would no more have such a man for a Verger in Westminster Abbey than they would let the people in (as they do at Bologna) to see the monuments for nothing.*

Again, an ancient and sombre town, under the brilliant sky; with heavy arcades over the footways of the older streets, and lighter and more cheerful archways in the newer portions of the town. Again, brown piles of sacred buildings, with more birds flying in and out of chinks in the stones; and more snarling monsters for the bases of the pillars. Again, rich churches, drowsy masses, curling incense, tinkling bells, priests in bright vestments: pictures, tapers, laced altar cloths, crosses, images, and artificial flowers.

There is a grave and learned air about the city, and a pleasant gloom upon it, that would leave it a distinct and separate impression in the mind, among a crowd of cities, though it were not still further marked in the traveller's remembrance by the two brick leaning towers (sufficiently unsightly in themselves, it must be acknowledged), inclining crosswise as if they were bowing stiffly to each other—a most extraordinary termination to the perspective of some of the narrow streets. The colleges, and churches too, and palaces: and, above all, the Academy of Fine Arts, where there are a host of interesting pictures, especially by GUIDO, DOMENICHINO, and LUDOVICO CARACCI: give it a place of its own in the memory. Even though these were not, and there were nothing else to remember it by, the great Meridian on the pavement of the church of San Petronio, where the sunbeams mark the time among the kneeling people, would give it a fanciful and pleasant interest.

Bologna being very full of tourists, detained there by an inundation which rendered the road to Florence impassable, I was quartered up at the top of an hotel, in an out-of-the-way room which I never could find: containing a bed big enough for a boarding-school, which I couldn't fall asleep in. The chief among the waiters who visited this lonely retreat, where there was no other company but the swallows in the broad eaves over the window, was a man of one idea in connection with the English; and the subject of this harmless monomania was Lord Byron. I made the discovery by accidentally remarking to him, at breakfast, that the matting with which the floor was covered was very comfortable at that season, when he immediately replied that Milor Beeron had been much attached to that kind of matting. Observing, at the same moment, that I took no milk, he exclaimed with enthusiasm,

* A far more liberal and just recognition of the public has arisen in Westminster Abbey since this was written.

that Milor Beeron had never touched it. At first, I took it for granted, in my innocence, that he had been one of the Beeron servants; but no, he said no, he was in the habit of speaking about my Lord to English gentlemen; that was all. He knew all about him, he said. In proof of it, he connected him with every possible topic, from the Monte Pulciano wine at dinner (which was grown on an estate he had owned), to the big bed itself, which was the very model of his. When I left the inn, he coupled with his final bow in the yard a parting assurance that the road by which I was going had been Milor Beeron's favourite ride; and before the horses' feet had well begun to clatter on the pavement, he ran briskly up-stairs again, I dare say to tell some other Englishman, in some other solitary room, that the guest who had just departed was Lord Beeron's living image.

I had entered Bologna by night—almost midnight—and all along the road thither, after our entrance into the Papal territory: which is not, in any part, supremely well governed, St. Peter's keys being rather rusty now: the driver had so worried about the danger of robbers in travelling after dark, and had so infected the Brave Courier, and the two had been so constantly stopping and getting up and down to look after a portmanteau which was tied on behind, that I should have felt almost obliged to any one who would have had the goodness to take it away. Hence it was stipulated that, whenever we left Bologna, we should start so as not to arrive at Ferrara later than eight at night; and a delightful afternoon and evening journey it was, albeit through a flat district, which gradually became more marshy from the overflow of brooks and rivers in the recent heavy rains.

At sunset, when I was walking on alone while the horses rested, I arrived upon a little scene, which, by one of those singular mental operations of which we are all conscious, seemed perfectly familiar to me, and which I see distinctly now. There was not much in it. In the blood-red light there was a mournful sheet of water, just stirred by the evening wind; upon its margin a few trees. In the foreground was a group of silent peasant girls leaning over the parapet of a little bridge, and looking, now up at the sky, now down into the water; in the distance, a deep bell; the shadow of approaching night on everything. If I had been murdered there in some former life, I could not have seemed to remember the place more thoroughly, or with a more emphatic chilling of the blood; and the real remembrance of it acquired in that minute is so strengthened by the imaginary recollection, that I hardly think I could forget it.

More solitary, more depopulated, more deserted, old Ferrara, than any city of the solemn brotherhood! The grass so grows up in the silent streets, that any one might make hay there, literally, while the sun shines. But the sun shines with diminished cheerfulness in grim Ferrara; and the people are so few who pass and repass through the public places, that the flesh of its inhabitants might be grass indeed, and growing in the squares.

I wonder why the head coppersmith in an Italian town always lives next door to the Hotel, or opposite: making the visitor feel as if the beating hammers were his own heart, palpitating with a deadly energy! I wonder why jealous corridors surround the bedroom on all sides, and fill it with unnecessary doors that can't be shut, and will not open, and abut on pitchy darkness! I wonder why it is not enough that these distrustful genii stand agape at one's dreams all night, but there must also be round open port-holes, high in the wall, suggestive, when a mouse or rat is heard behind the wainscot, of a somebody scraping the wall with his toes, in his endeavours to reach one of these port-holes and look in! I wonder why the faggots are so constructed as to know of no effect but an agony of heat when they are lighted and replenished, and an agony of cold and suffocation at all other times! I wonder, above all, why it is the great feature of domestic architecture in Italian inns that all the fire goes up the chimney, except the smoke!

The answer matters little. Coppersmiths, doors, port-holes, smoke, and faggots are welcome to me. Give me the smiling face of the attendant, man or woman; the courteous manner; the amiable desire to please and to be pleased: the light-hearted, pleasant, simple air—so many jewels set in dirt—and I am theirs again to-morrow!

Ariosto's house, Tasso's prison, a rare old Gothic cathedral, and more churches of course, are the sights of Ferrara. But the long-silent streets, and the dismantled palaces, where ivy waves in lieu of banners, and where rank weeds are slowly creeping up the long-untrodden stairs, are the best sights of all.

The aspect of this dreary town, half an hour before sunrise one fine morning, when I left it, was as picturesque as it seemed unreal and spectral. It was no matter that the people were not yet out of bed; for, if they had all been up and busy, they would have made but little difference in that desert of a place. It was best

to see it without a single figure in the picture; a city of the dead, without one solitary survivor. Pestilence might have ravaged streets, squares, and market-places; and sack and siege have ruined the old houses, battered down their doors and windows, and made breaches in their roofs. In one part a great tower rose into the air; the only landmark in the melancholy view. In another a prodigious Castle, with a moat about it, stood aloof: a sullen city in itself. In the black dungeons of this castle, Parisina and her lover were beheaded in the dead of night. The red light, beginning to shine when I looked back upon it, stained its walls without, as they have, many a time, been stained within, in old days; but for any sign of life they gave, the castle and the city might have been avoided by all human creatures from the moment when the axe went down upon the last of the two lovers: and might have never vibrated to another sound

> Beyond the blow that to the block
> Pierced through with forced and sullen shock.

Coming to the Po, which was greatly swollen, and running fiercely, we crossed it by a floating bridge of boats, and so came into the Austrian territory, and resumed our journey: through a country of which, for some miles, a great part was under water. The Brave Courier and the soldiery had first quarrelled, for half an hour or more, over our eternal passport. But this was a daily relaxation with the Brave, who was always stricken deaf when shabby functionaries in uniform came, as they constantly did come, plunging out of wooden boxes to look at it—or, in other words, to beg—and who, stone deaf to my entreaties that the man might have a trifle given him, and we resume our journey in peace, was wont to sit reviling the functionary in broken English: while the unfortunate man's face was a portrait of mental agony framed in the coach window, from his perfect ignorance of what was being said to his disparagement.

There was a Postillion, in the course of this day's journey, as wild and savagely good-looking a vagabond as you would desire to see. He was a tall, stout-made, dark-complexioned fellow, with a profusion of shaggy black hair hanging all over his face, and great black whiskers stretching down his throat. His dress was a torn suit of rifle green, garnished here and there with red; a steeple-crowned hat, innocent of nap, with a broken and bedraggled feather stuck in the band; and a flaming red neckerchief hanging on his shoulders. He was not in the saddle, but reposed, quite at his ease, on a sort of low foot-board in front of the post-chaise, down among the horses' tails—convenient for having his brains kicked out at any moment. To this Brigand, the Brave Courier, when we were at a reasonable trot, happened to suggest the practicability of going faster. He received the proposal with a perfect yell of derision; brandished his whip about his head (such a whip! it was more like a home-made bow); flung up his heels much higher than the horses; and disappeared, in a paroxysm, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the axletree. I fully expected to see him lying in the road, a hundred yards behind, but up came the steeple-crowned hat again next minute, and he was seen reposing, as on a sofa, entertaining himself with the idea, and crying, "Ha, ha! what next? Oh, the devil! Faster, too! Shoo—hoo—o—o!" (This last ejaculation an inexpressibly defiant hoot.) Being anxious to reach our immediate destination that night, I ventured, by-and-by, to repeat the experiment on my own account. It produced exactly the same effect. Round flew the whip with the same scornful flourish, up came the heels, down went the steeple-crowned hat, and presently he reappeared, reposing as before, and saying to himself, "Ha, ha! what next? Faster, too! Oh, the devil! Shoo—hoo—o—o!"

AN ITALIAN DREAM.

I HAD been travelling for some days; resting very little in the night, and never in the day. The rapid and unbroken succession of novelties that had passed before me came back like half-formed dreams: and a crowd of objects wandered in the greatest confusion through my mind, as I travelled on by a solitary road. At intervals, some one among them would stop, as it were, in its restless flitting to and fro, and enable me to look at it quite steadily, and behold it in full distinctness. After a few moments it would dissolve, like a view in a magic lantern; and while I saw some part of it quite plainly, and some faintly, and some not at all, would show me another of the many places I had lately seen, lingering behind it, and coming through it. This was no sooner visible than, in its turn, it melted into something else.

At one moment I was standing again before the brown old rugged churches of Modena. As I recognised the curious pillars with grim monsters for their bases, I seemed to see them.

standing by themselves in the quiet square at Padua, where there were the staid old University, and the figures demurely gowned, grouped here and there in the open space about it. Then, I was strolling in the outskirts of that pleasant city, admiring the unusual neatness of the dwelling-houses, gardens, and orchards, as I had seen them a few hours before. In their stead arose, immediately, the two towers of Bologna; and the most obstinate of all these objects failed to hold its ground a minute, before the monstrous moated castle of Ferrara, which, like an illustration to a wild romance, came back again in the red sunrise, lording it over the solitary, grass-grown, withered town. In short, I had that incoherent, but delightful jumble in my brain, which travellers are apt to have, and are indolently willing to encourage. Every shake of the coach in which I sat, half dozing in the dark, appeared to jerk some new recollection out of its place, and to jerk some other new recollection into it; and in this state I fell asleep.

I was awakened after some time (as I thought) by the stopping of the coach. It was now quite night, and we were at the water-side. There lay here a black boat, with a little house or cabin in it of the same mournful colour. When I had taken my seat in this, the boat was paddled, by two men, towards a great light lying in the distance on the sea.

Ever and again there was a dismal sigh of wind. It ruffled the water, and rocked the boat, and sent the dark clouds flying before the stars. I could not but think how strange it was to be floating away at that hour: leaving the land behind, and going on towards this light upon the sea. It soon began to burn brighter; and, from being one light, became a cluster of tapers, twinkling and shining out of the water, as the boat approached towards them by a dreamy kind of track, marked out upon the sea by posts and piles.

We had floated on, five miles or so, over the dark water, when I heard it rippling, in my dream, against some obstruction near at hand. Looking out attentively, I saw, through the gloom, a something black and massive—like a shore, but lying close and flat upon the water, like a raft—which we were gliding past. The chief of the two rowers said it was a burial-place.

Full of the interest and wonder which a cemetery lying out there, in the lonely sea, inspired, I turned to gaze upon it as it should recede in our path, when it was quickly shut out from my view. Before I knew by what, or how, I found that we were gliding up a street—a phantom street; the houses rising on both sides from the water, and the black boat gliding on beneath their windows. Lights were shining from some of these casements, plumbing the depth of the black stream with their reflected rays; but all was profoundly silent.

So we advanced into this ghostly city, continuing to hold our course through narrow streets and lanes, all filled and flowing with water. Some of the corners where our way branched off were so acute and narrow, that it seemed impossible for the long, slender boat to turn them; but the rowers, with a low, melodious cry of warning, sent it skimming on without a pause. Sometimes the rowers of another black boat like our own echoed the cry, and, slackening their speed (as I thought we did ours), would come flitting past us, like a dark shadow. Other boats, of the same sombre hue, were lying moored, I thought, to painted pillars, near to dark, mysterious doors that opened straight upon the water. Some of these were empty; in some the rowers lay asleep; towards one I saw some figures coming down a gloomy archway from the interior of a palace: gaily dressed, and attended by torch-bearers. It was but a glimpse I had of them; for a bridge so low and close upon the boat that it seemed ready to fall down and crush us: one of the many bridges that perplexed the Dream: blotted them out instantly. On we went, floating towards the heart of this strange place—with water all about us where never water was elsewhere—clusters of houses, churches, heaps of stately buildings growing out of it—and, everywhere, the same extraordinary silence. Presently, we shot across a broad and open stream; and passing, as I thought, before a spacious paved quay, where the bright lamps with which it was illuminated showed long rows of arches and pillars, of ponderous construction and great strength, but as light to the eye as garlands of hoar frost or gossamer—and where, for the first time, I saw people walking—arrived at a flight of steps leading from the water to a large mansion, where, having passed through corridors and galleries innumerable, I lay down to rest; listening to the black boats stealing up and down below the window on the rippling water till I fell asleep.

The glory of the day that broke upon me in this Dream; its freshness, motion, buoyancy; its sparkles of the sun in water; its clear blue sky and rustling air; no waking words can tell. But, from my window, I looked down on boats and barks; on masts, sails, cordage, flags; on groups of busy sailors working at the cargoes of these vessels; on wide quays strewn with bales, casks, merchandise of many kinds; on great

ships lying near at hand in stately indolence; on islands crowned with gorgeous domes and turrets; and where golden crosses glittered in the light, atop of wondrous churches springing from the sea! Going down upon the margin of the green sea, rolling on before the door, and filling all the streets, I came upon a place of such surpassing beauty, and such grandeur, that all the rest was poor and faded, in comparison with its absorbing loveliness.

It was a great Piazza, as I thought; anchored, like all the rest, in the deep ocean. On its broad bosom was a Palace, more majestic and magnificent in its old age than all the buildings of the earth, in the high prime and fulness of their youth. Cloisters and galleries: so light, they might have been the work of fairy hands: so strong, that centuries had battered them in vain: wound round and round this palace, and enfolded it with a Cathedral, gorgeous in the wild luxuriant fancies of the East. At no great distance from its porch, a lofty tower, standing by

AN ITALIAN DREAM.

itself, and rearing its proud head, alone, into the sky, looked out upon the Adriatic Sea. Near to the margin of the stream were two ill-omened pillars of red granite; one having on its top a figure with a sword and shield; the other, a winged lion. Not far from these, again, a second tower: richest of the rich in all its decorations: even here, where all was rich: sustained aloft a great orb, gleaming with gold and deepest blue: the Twelve Signs painted on it, and a mimic sun revolving in its course around them: while above, two bronze giants hammered out the hours upon a sounding bell. An oblong square of lofty houses of the whitest stone, surrounded by a light and beautiful arcade, formed part of this enchanted scene; and, here and there, gay masts for flags rose, tapering from the pavement of the unsubstantial ground.

I thought I entered the Cathedral, and went in and out among its many arches: traversing its whole extent. A grand and dreamy structure, of immense proportions; golden with old mosaics;

redolent of perfumes; dim with the smoke of incense; costly in treasure of precious stones and metals, glittering through iron bars; holy with the bodies of deceased saints; rainbow-hued with windows of stained glass; dark with carved woods and coloured marbles; obscure in its vast heights and lengthened distances; shining with silver lamps and winking lights; unreal, fantastic, solemn, inconceivable throughout. I thought I entered the old palace; pacing silent galleries and council-chambers, where the old rulers of this mistress of the waters looked sternly out, in pictures, from the walls, and where her high-prowed galleys, still victorious on canvas, fought and conquered as of old. I thought I wandered through its halls of state and triumph—bare and empty now!—and musing on its pride and might, extinct: for that was past; all past: heard a voice say, "Some tokens of its ancient rule, and some consoling reasons for its downfall, may be traced here yet!"

I dreamed that I was led on, then, into some jealous rooms, communicating with a prison near the palace; separated from it by a lofty bridge crossing a narrow street; and called, I dreamed, the Bridge of Sighs.

But first I passed two jagged slits in a stone wall; the lions' mouths—now toothless—where, in the distempered horror of my sleep, I thought denunciations of innocent men to the old wicked Council had been dropped through, many a time, when the night was dark. So, when I saw the council-room to which such prisoners were taken for examination, and the door by which they passed out when they were condemned—a door that never closed upon a man with life and hope before him—my heart appeared to die within me.

It was smitten harder though, when, torch in hand, I descended from the cheerful day into two ranges, one below another, of dismal, awful, horrible stone cells. They were quite dark. Each had a loophole in its massive wall, where, in the old time, every day, a torch was placed—I dreamed—to light the prisoner within for half an hour. The captives, by the glimmering of these brief rays, had scratched and cut inscriptions in the blackened vaults. I saw them. For their labour with a rusty nail's point had outlived their agony and them, through many generations.

One cell I saw, in which no man remained for more than four-and-twenty hours; being marked for dead before he entered it. Hard by, another, and a dismal one, whereto, at midnight, the confessor came—a monk brown-robed, and hooded—ghastly in the day, and free bright air, but, in the midnight of that murky prison, Hope's extinguisher, and Murder's herald. I had my foot upon the spot where, at the same dread hour, the shriven prisoner was strangled; and struck my hand upon the guilty door—low-browed and stealthy—through which the lumpish sack was carried out into a boat, and rowed away, and drowned where it was death to cast a net.

Around this dungeon stronghold, and above some part of it: licking the rough walls without, and smearing them with damp and slime within: stuffing dank weeds and refuse into chinks and crevices, as if the very stones and bars had mouths to stop: furnishing a smooth road for the removal of the bodies of the secret victims of the state—a road so ready that it went along with them, and ran before them, like a cruel officer—flowed the same water that filled this Dream of mine, and made it seem one, even at the time.

Descending from the palace by a staircase, called, I thought, the Giant's—I had some imaginary recollection of an old man abdicating, coming, more slowly and more feebly, down it, when he heard the bell proclaiming his successor—I glided off, in one of the dark boats, until we came to an old arsenal guarded by four marble lions. To make my Dream more monstrous and unlikely, one of these had words and sentences upon its body, inscribed there at an unknown time, and in an unknown language; so that their purport was a mystery to all men.

There was little sound of hammers in this place for building ships, and little work in progress; for the greatness of the city was no more, as I have said. Indeed, it seemed a very wreck found drifting on the sea; a strange flag hoisted in its honourable stations, and strangers standing at its helm. A splendid barge, in which its ancient chief had gone forth, pompously, at certain periods, to wed the ocean, lay here, I thought, no more; but, in its place, there was a tiny model, made from recollection like the city's greatness; and it told of what had been (so are the strong and weak confounded in the dust) almost as eloquently as the massive pillars, arches, roofs, reared to overshadow stately ships that had no other shadow now, upon the water or the earth.

An armoury was there yet. Plundered and despoiled; but an armoury. With a fierce standard, taken from the Turks, drooping in the dull air of its cage. Rich suits of mail worn by great warriors were hoarded there; crossbows and bolts; quivers full of arrows; spears; swords, daggers, maces, shields, and heavy-headed axes. Plates of wrought steel and iron,

to make the gallant horse a monster cased in metal scales; and one spring weapon (easy to be carried in the breast) designed to do its office noiselessly, and made for shooting men with poisoned darts.

One press or case I saw full of accursed instruments of torture: horribly contrived to cramp, and pinch, and grind, and crush men's bones, and tear and twist them with the torment of a thousand deaths. Before it were two iron helmets, with breast-pieces: made to close up tight and smooth upon the heads of living sufferers; and fastened on to each was a small knob or anvil, where the directing devil could repose his elbow at his ease, and listen, near the walled-up ear, to the lamentations and confessions of the wretch within. There was that grim resemblance in them to the human shape—they were such moulds of sweating faces, pained and cramped—that it was difficult to think them empty; and terrible distortions lingering within them seemed to follow me, when, taking to my boat again, I rowed off to a kind of garden or public walk in the sea, where there were grass and trees. But I forgot them when I stood upon its farthest brink—I stood there in my dream—and looked, along the ripple, to the setting sun; before me, in the sky and on the deep, a crimson flush; and behind me the whole city resolving into streaks of red and purple on the water.

In the luxurious wonder of so rare a dream, I took but little heed of time, and had but little understanding of its flight. But there were days and nights in it; and when the sun was high, and when the rays of lamps were crooked in the running water, I was still afloat, I thought: plashing the slippery walls and houses with the cleavings of the tide, as my black boat, borne upon it, skimmed along the streets.

Sometimes, alighting at the doors of churches and vast palaces, I wandered on, from room to room, from aisle to aisle, through labyrinths of rich altars, ancient monuments; decayed apartments where the furniture, half awful, half grotesque, was mouldering away. Pictures were there, replete with such enduring beauty and expression: with such passion, truth, and power: that they seemed so many young and fresh realities among a host of spectres. I thought these often intermingled with the old days of the city: with its beauties, tyrants, captains, patriots, merchants, courtiers, priests: nay, with its very stones, and bricks, and public places; all of which lived again, about me, on the walls. Then, coming down some marble staircase where the water lapped and oozed against the lower steps, I passed into my boat again, and went on in my dream.

Floating down narrow lanes, where carpenters, at work with plane and chisel in their shops, tossed the light shaving straight upon the water, where it lay like weed, or ebbed away before me in a tangled heap. Past open doors, decayed and rotten from long steeping in the wet, through which some scanty patch of vine shone green and bright, making unusual shadows on the pavement with its trembling leaves. Past quays and terraces, where women, gracefully veiled, were passing and repassing, and where idlers were reclining in the sunshine, on flagstones and on flights of steps. Past bridges, where there were idlers too: loitering and looking over. Below stone balconies, erected at a giddy height, before the loftiest windows of the loftiest houses. Past plots of garden, theatres, shrines, prodigious piles of architecture—Gothic—Saracenic—fanciful with all the fancies of all times and countries. Past buildings that were high, and low, and black, and white, and straight, and crooked; mean and grand, crazy and strong. Twining among a tangled lot of boats and barges, and shooting out at last into a Grand Canal! There, in the errant fancy of my dream, I saw old Shylock passing to and fro upon a bridge, all built upon with shops and humming with the tongues of men; a form I seemed to know for Desdemona's, leaned down through a latticed blind to pluck a flower. And, in the dream, I thought that Shakspeare's spirit was abroad upon the water somewhere: stealing through the city.

At night, when two votive lamps burnt before an image of the Virgin, in a gallery outside the great cathedral, near the roof, I fancied that the great piazza of the Winged Lion was a blaze of cheerful light, and that its whole arcade was thronged with people; while crowds were diverting themselves in splendid coffee-houses opening from it—which were never shut, I thought, but open all night long. When the bronze giants struck the hour of midnight on the bell, I thought the life and animation of the city were all centred here; and as I rowed away, abreast the silent quays, I only saw them dotted, here and there, with sleeping boatmen wrapped up in their cloaks, and lying at full length upon the stones.

But, close about the quays and churches, palaces and prisons: sucking at their walls, and welling up into the secret places of the town: crept the water always. Noiseless and watchful: coiled round and round it, in its many folds, like an old serpent: waiting for the time, I

thought, when people should look down into its depths for any stone of the old city that had claimed to be its mistress.

Thus it floated me away, until I awoke in the old Market-place at Verona. I have, many and many a time, thought since of this strange Dream upon the water: half wondering if it lie there yet, and if its name be VENICE.

BY VERONA, MANTUA, AND MILAN, ACROSS THE PASS OF THE SIMPLON INTO SWITZERLAND.

I HAD been half afraid to go to Verona, lest it should at all put me out of conceit with Romeo and Juliet. But, I was no sooner come into the old Market-place than the misgiving vanished. It is so fanciful, quaint, and picturesque a place, formed by such an extraordinary and rich variety of fantastic buildings, that there could be nothing better at the core of even this romantic town: scene of one of the most romantic and beautiful of stories.

It was natural enough to go straight from the Market-place to the House of the Capulets, now degenerated into a most miserable little inn. Noisy vetturini and muddy market-carts were disputing possession of the yard, which was ankle deep in dirt, with a brood of splashed and bespattered geese; and there was a grim-visaged dog, viciously panting in a doorway, who would certainly have had Romeo by the leg, the moment he put it over the wall, if he had existed and been at large in those times. The orchard fell into other hands, and was parted off many years ago; but there used to be one attached to the house—or at all events there may have been—and the hat (Cappello) the ancient cognizance of the family, may still be seen, carved in stone, over the gateway of the yard. The geese, the market-carts, their drivers, and the dog were somewhat in the way of the story, it must be confessed; and it would have been pleasanter to have found the house empty, and to have been able to walk through the disused rooms. But the hat was unspeakably comfortable; and the place where the garden used to be, hardly less so. Besides, the house is a distrustful, jealous-looking house as one would desire to see, though of a very moderate size. So I was quite satisfied with it, as the veritable mansion of old Capulet, and was correspondingly grateful in my acknowledgments to an extremely unsentimental middle-aged lady, the Padrona of the Hotel, who was lounging on the threshold looking at the geese; and who at least resembled the Capulets in the one particular of being very great indeed in the "Family" way.

From Juliet's home to Juliet's tomb is a transition as natural to the visitor as to fair Juliet herself, or to the proudest Juliet that ever has taught the torches to burn bright in any time. So, I went off, with a guide, to an old, old garden, once belonging to an old, old convent, I suppose; and being admitted, at a shattered gate, by a bright-eyed woman who was washing clothes, went down some walks where fresh plants and young flowers were prettily growing among fragments of old wall and ivy-covered mounds; and was shown a little tank, or water trough, which the bright-eyed woman, drying her arms upon her kerchief, called "La tomba di Giulietta la sfortunata." With the best disposition in the world to believe, I could do no more than believe that the bright-eyed woman believed; so I gave her that much credit, and her customary fee in ready money. It was a pleasure, rather than a disappointment, that Juliet's resting-place was forgotten. However consolatory it may have been to Yorick's ghost to hear the feet upon the pavement overhead, and, twenty times a day, the repetition of his name, it is better for Juliet to lie out of the track of tourists, and to have no visitors but such as come to graves in spring rain, and sweet air, and sunshine.

Pleasant Verona! With its beautiful old palaces, and charming country in the distance, seen from terrace walks, and stately, balustraded galleries. With its Roman gates, still spanning the fair street, and casting, on the sun-light of to-day, the shade of fifteen hundred years ago. With its marble-fitted churches, lofty towers, rich architecture, and quaint old quiet thoroughfares, where shouts of Montagues and Capulets once resounded,

> And made Verona's ancient citizens
> Cast by their grave beseeming ornaments,
> To wield old partisans.

With its fast-rushing river, picturesque old bridge, great castle, waving cypresses, and prospect so delightful and so cheerful! Pleasant Verona!

In the midst of it, in the Piazza di Brá—a spirit of old time among the familiar realities of the passing hour—is the great Roman Amphitheatre. So well preserved and carefully maintained, that every row of seats is there unbroken. Over certain of the arches, the old Roman

numerals may yet be seen; and there are corridors, and staircases, and subterranean passages for beasts, and winding ways, above-ground and below, as when the fierce thousands hurried in and out, intent upon the bloody shows of the arena. Nestling in some of the shadows and hollow places of the walls, now, are smiths with their forges, and a few small dealers of one kind or other; and there are green weeds, and leaves, and grass upon the parapet. But little else is greatly changed.

When I had traversed all about it with great interest, and had gone up to the topmost round of seats, and, turning from the lovely panorama closed in by the distant Alps, looked down into the building, it seemed to lie before me like the inside of a prodigious hat of plaited straw, with an enormously broad brim and a shallow crown: the plaits being represented by the four-and-forty rows of seats. The comparison is a homely and fantastic one, in sober remembrance and on paper, but it was irresistibly suggested at the moment, nevertheless.

An equestrian troop had been there a short time before—the same troop, I dare say, that appeared to the old lady in the church at Modena—and had scooped out a little ring at one end of the arena; where their performances had taken place, and where the marks of their horses' feet were still fresh. I could not but picture to myself a handful of spectators gathered together on one or two of the old stone seats, and a spangled Cavalier being gallant, or a Policinello funny, with the grim walls looking on. Above all, I thought how strangely those Roman mutes would gaze upon the favourite comic scene of the travelling English, where a British nobleman (Lord John), with a very loose stomach: dressed in a blue tailed coat down to his heels, bright yellow breeches, and a white hat: comes abroad, riding double on a rearing horse, with an English lady (Lady Betsy) in a straw bonnet and green veil, and a red spencer; and who always carries a gigantic reticule, and a put-up parasol.

I walked through and through the town all the rest of the day, and could have walked there until now, I think. In one place there was a very pretty modern theatre, where they had just performed the opera (always popular in Verona) of Romeo and Juliet. In another there was a collection, under a colonnade, of Greek, Roman, and Etruscan remains, presided over by an ancient man who might have been an Etruscan relic himself; for he was not strong enough to open the iron gate when he had unlocked it, and had neither voice enough to be audible when he described the curiosities, nor sight enough to see them: he was so very old. In another place there was a gallery of pictures: so abominably bad, that it was quite delightful to see them mouldering away. But anywhere: in the churches, among the palaces, in the streets, on the bridge, or down beside the river: it was always pleasant Verona, and in my remembrance always will be.

I read Romeo and Juliet in my own room at the inn that night—of course, no Englishman had ever read it there before—and set out for Mantua next day at sunrise, repeating to myself (in the coupé of an omnibus, and next to the conductor, who was reading the Mysteries of Paris),

> There is no world without Verona's walls,
> But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
> Hence-banished is banish'd from the world,
> And world's exile is death——

which reminded me that Romeo was only banished five-and-twenty miles after all, and rather disturbed my confidence in his energy and boldness.

Was the way to Mantua as beautiful in his time, I wonder? Did it wind through pasture land as green, bright with the same glancing streams, and dotted with fresh clumps of graceful trees? Those purple mountains lay on the horizon then, for certain; and the dresses of these peasant girls, who wear a great, knobbed, silver pin like an English "life-preserver" through their hair behind, can hardly be much changed. The hopeful feeling of so bright a morning, and so exquisite a sunrise, can have been no stranger, even to an exiled lover's breast; and Mantua itself must have broken on him in the prospect, with its towers, and walls, and water, pretty much as on a commonplace and matrimonial omnibus. He made the same sharp twists and turns, perhaps, over two rumbling drawbridges; passed through the like long, covered, wooden bridge; and, leaving the marshy water behind, approached the rusty gate of stagnant Mantua.

If ever a man were suited to his place of residence, and his place of residence to him, the lean Apothecary and Mantua came together in a perfect fitness of things. It may have been more stirring then, perhaps. If so, the Apothecary was a man in advance of his time, and knew what Mantua would be in eighteen hundred and forty-four. He fasted much, and that assisted him in his foreknowledge.

I put up at the Hotel of the Golden Lion, and was in my own room arranging plans with the Brave Courier, when there came a modest little

tap at the door, which opened on an outer gallery surrounding a courtyard; and an intensely shabby little man looked in, to inquire if the gentleman would have a Cicerone to show the town. His face was so very wistful and anxious, in the half-opened doorway, and there was so much poverty expressed in his faded suit and little pinched hat, and in the threadbare worsted glove with which he held it—not expressed the less, because these were evidently his genteel clothes, hastily slipped on—that I would as soon have trodden on him as dismissed him. I engaged him on the instant, and he stepped in directly.

While I finished the discussion in which I was engaged, he stood, beaming by himself in a corner, making a feint of brushing my hat with his arm. If his fee had been as many napoleons as it was francs, there could not have shot over the twilight of his shabbiness such a gleam of sun as lighted up the whole man, now that he was hired.

"Well!" said I, when I was ready, "shall we go out now?"

"If the gentleman pleases. It is a beautiful day. A little fresh, but charming; altogether charming. The gentleman will allow me to open the door. This is the Inn Yard. The courtyard of the Golden Lion! The gentleman will please to mind his footing on the stairs."

We were now in the street.

"This is the street of the Golden Lion. This, the outside of the Golden Lion. The interesting window up there, on the first Piano, where the pane of glass is broken, is the window of the gentleman's chamber!"

Having viewed all these remarkable objects, I inquired if there were much to see in Mantua.

"Well! Truly, no. Not much! So, so," he said, shrugging his shoulders apologetically.

"Many churches?"

"No. Nearly all suppressed by the French."

"Monasteries or convents?"

"No. The French again! Nearly all suppressed by Napoleon."

"Much business?"

"Very little business."

"Many strangers?"

"Ah Heaven!"

I thought he would have fainted.

"Then, when we have seen the two large Churches yonder, what shall we do next?" said I.

He looked up the street, and down the street, and rubbed his chin timidly; and then said, glancing in my face as if a light had broken on his mind, yet with a humble appeal to my forbearance that was perfectly irresistible:

"We can take a little turn about the town, Signore!" (Si può far' un piccolo giro della citta.)

It was impossible to be anything but delighted with the proposal, so we set off together in great good-humour. In the relief of his mind, he opened his heart, and gave up as much of Mantua as a Cicerone could.

"One must eat," he said; "but, bah! it was a dull place, without doubt!"

He made as much as possible of the Basilica of Santa Andrea—a noble church—and of an enclosed portion of the pavement, about which tapers were burning, and a few people kneeling, and under which is said to be preserved the Sangreal of the old Romances. This church disposed of, and another after it (the Cathedral of San Pietro), we went to the Museum, which was shut up. "It was all the same," he said. "Bah! There was not much inside!" Then we went to see the Piazza del Diavolo, built by the Devil (for no particular purpose) in a single night; then, the Piazza Virgiliana; then, the statue of Virgil—*our* Poet, my little friend said, plucking up a spirit for the moment, and putting his hat a little on one side. Then we went to a dismal sort of farmyard, by which a picture-gallery was approached. The moment the gate of this retreat was opened, some five hundred geese came waddling round us, stretching out their necks, and clamouring in the most hideous manner, as if they were ejaculating, "Oh! here's somebody come to see the Pictures! Don't go up! Don't go up!" While we went up, they waited very quietly about the door in a crowd, cackling to one another occasionally in a subdued tone; but, the instant we appeared again, their necks came out like telescopes, and setting up a great noise, which meant, I have no doubt, "What, you would go, would you? What do you think of it? How do you like it?" they attended us to the outer gate, and cast us forth, derisively, into Mantua.

The geese who saved the Capitol were, as compared with these, Pork to the learned Pig. What a gallery it was! I would take their opinion on a question of art, in preference to the discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Now that we were standing in the street, after being thus ignominiously escorted thither, my little friend was plainly reduced to the "piccolo giro," or little circuit of the town, he had formerly proposed. But my suggestion that we should visit the Palazzo Tè (of which I had heard a great deal, as a strange wild place)

imparted new life to him, and away we went.

The secret of the length of Midas's ears would have been more extensively known, if that servant of his, who whispered it to the reeds, had lived in Mantua, where there are reeds and rushes enough to have published it to all the world. The Palazzo Tè stands in a swamp, among this sort of vegetation; and is, indeed, as singular a place as I ever saw.

Not for its dreariness, though it is very dreary. Nor for its dampness, though it is very damp. Nor for its desolate condition, though it is as desolate and neglected as house can be. But chiefly for the unaccountable nightmares with which its interior has been decorated (among other subjects of more delicate execution) by Giulio Romano. There is a leering Giant over a certain chimney-piece, and there are dozens of Giants (Titans warring with Jove) on the walls of another room, so inconceivably ugly and grotesque, that it is marvellous how any man can have imagined such creatures. In the chamber in which they abound, these monsters, with swollen faces and cracked cheeks, and every kind of distortion of look and limb, are depicted as staggering under the weight of falling buildings, and being overwhelmed in the ruins; upheaving masses of rock, and burying themselves beneath; vainly striving to sustain the pillars of heavy roofs that topple down upon their heads; and, in a word, undergoing and doing every kind of mad and demoniacal destruction. The figures are immensely large, and exaggerated to the utmost pitch of uncouthness; the colouring is harsh and disagreeable; and the whole effect more like (I should imagine) a violent rush of blood to the head of the spectator, than any real picture set before him by the hand of an artist. This apoplectic performance was shown by a sickly-looking woman, whose appearance was referable, I dare say, to the bad air of the marshes; but it was difficult to help feeling as if she were too much haunted by the Giants, and they were frightening her to death, all alone in that exhausted cistern of a Palace, among the reeds and rushes, with the mists hovering about outside, and stalking round and round it continually.

Our walk through Mantua showed us, in almost every street, some suppressed church: now used for a warehouse, now for nothing at all: all as crazy and dismantled as they could be, short of tumbling down bodily. The marshy town was so intensely dull and flat, that the dirt upon it seemed not to have come there in the ordinary course, but to have settled and mantled on its surface as on standing water. And yet there were some business dealings going on, and some profits realising; for there were arcades full of Jews, where those extraordinary people were sitting outside their shops, contemplating their stores of stuffs, and woollens, and bright handkerchiefs, and trinkets; and looking, in all respects, as wary and business-like as their brethren in Houndsditch, London.

Having selected a Vetturino from among the neighbouring Christians, who agreed to carry us to Milan in two days and a half, and to start, next morning, as soon as the gates were opened, I returned to the Golden Lion, and dined luxuriously in my own room, in a narrow passage between two bedsteads: confronted by a smoky fire, and backed up by a chest of drawers. At six o'clock next morning we were jingling in the dark through the wet, cold mist that enshrouded the town; and, before noon, the driver (a native of Mantua, and sixty years of age, or thereabouts) began *to ask the way* to Milan.

It lay through Bozzolo; formerly a little republic, and now one of the most deserted and poverty-stricken of towns: where the landlord of the miserable inn (God bless him! it was his weekly custom) was distributing infinitesimal coins among a clamorous herd of women and children, whose rags were fluttering in the wind and rain outside his door, where they were gathered to receive his charity. It lay through mist, and mud, and rain, and vines trained low upon the ground, all that day and the next; the first sleeping-place being Cremona, memorable for its dark brick churches, and immensely high tower, the Torrazzo—to say nothing of its violins, of which it certainly produces none in these degenerate days; and the second, Lodi. Then we went on, through more mud, mist, and rain, and marshy ground: and through such a fog as Englishmen, strong in the faith of their own grievances, are apt to believe is nowhere to be found but in their own country, until we entered the paved streets of Milan.

The fog was so dense here, that the spire of the far-famed Cathedral might as well have been at Bombay, for anything that could be seen of it at that time. But as we halted to refresh, for a few days then, and returned to Milan again next summer, I had ample opportunities of seeing the glorious structure in all its majesty and beauty.

All Christian homage to the saint who lies within it! There are many good and true saints in the calendar, but San Carlo Borromeo has—if I may quote Mrs. Primrose on such a subject—"my warm heart." A charitable doctor to the

sick, a munificent friend to the poor, and this not in any spirit of blind bigotry, but as the bold opponent of enormous abuses in the Romish church, I honour his memory. I honour it none the less because he was nearly slain by a priest, suborned by priests to murder him at the altar: in acknowledgment of his endeavours to reform a false and hypocritical brotherhood of monks. Heaven shield all imitators of San Carlo Borromeo as it shielded him! A reforming Pope would need a little shielding, even now.

The subterranean chapel in which the body of San Carlo Borromeo is preserved, presents as striking and as ghastly a contrast, perhaps, as any place can show. The tapers which are lighted down there, flash and gleam on altirilievi in gold and silver, delicately wrought by skilful hands, and representing the principal events in the life of the saint. Jewels, and precious metals, shine and sparkle on every side. A windlass slowly removes the front of the altar; and within it, in a gorgeous shrine of gold and silver, is seen, through alabaster, the shrivelled mummy of a man: the pontifical robes with which it is adorned radiant with diamonds, emeralds, rubies: every costly and magnificent gem. The shrunken heap of poor earth in the midst of this great glitter is more pitiful than if it lay upon a dunghill. There is not a ray of imprisoned light in all the flash and fire of jewels, but seems to mock the dusty holes where eyes were once. Every thread of silk in the rich vestments seems only a provision from the worms that spin, for the behoof of worms that propagate in sepulchres.

In the old refectory of the dilapidated Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie is the work of art, perhaps better known than any other in the world: the Last Supper, by Leonardo da Vinci —with a door cut through it by the intelligent Dominican friars, to facilitate their operations at dinner-time.

I am not mechanically acquainted with the art of painting, and have no other means of judging of a picture than as I see it resembling and refining upon nature, and presenting graceful combinations of forms and colours. I am, therefore, no authority whatever in reference to the "touch" of this or that master; though I know very well (as anybody may, who chooses to think about the matter) that few very great masters can possibly have painted, in the compass of their lives, one half of the pictures that bear their names, and that are recognised, by many aspirants to a reputation for taste, as undoubted originals. But this by the way. Of the Last Supper I would simply observe, that in its beautiful composition and arrangement, there it is, at Milan, a wonderful picture; and that, in its original colouring, or in its original expression of any single face or feature, there it is not. Apart from the damage it has sustained from damp, decay, or neglect, it has been (as Barry shows) so retouched upon, and repainted, and that so clumsily, that many of the heads are, now, positive deformities, with patches of paint and plaster sticking upon them like wens, and utterly distorting the expression. Where the original artist set that impress of his genius on a face, which, almost in a line or touch, separated him from meaner painters, and made him what he was, succeeding bunglers, filling up, or painting across seams and cracks, have been quite unable to imitate his hand; and putting in some scowls, or frowns, or wrinkles of their own, have blotched and spoiled the work. This is so well established as an historical fact, that I should not repeat it, at the risk of being tedious, but for having observed an English gentleman before the picture, who was at great pains to fall into what I may describe as mild convulsions, at certain minute details of expression which are not left in it. Whereas, it would be comfortable and rational for travellers and critics to arrive at a general understanding that it cannot fail to have been a work of extraordinary merit once; when, with so few of its original beauties remaining, the grandeur of the general design is yet sufficient to sustain it as a piece replete with interest and dignity.

We achieved the other sights of Milan in due course, and a fine city it is, though not so unmistakably Italian as to possess the characteristic qualities of many towns far less important in themselves. The Corso, where the Milanese gentry ride up and down in carriages, and rather than not do which they would half starve themselves at home, is a most noble public promenade, shaded by long avenues of trees. In the splendid theatre of La Scala there was a ballet of action performed after the opera, under the title of Prometheus: in the beginning of which, some hundred or two of men and women represented our mortal race before the refinements of the arts and sciences, and loves and graces, came on earth to soften them. I never saw anything more effective. Generally speaking, the pantomimic action of the Italians is more remarkable for its sudden and impetuous character than for its delicate expression; but, in this case, the drooping monotony: the weary, miserable, listless, moping life: the sordid passions and desires of human creatures, destitute of those elevating influences to which we owe so

much, and to whose promoters we render so little: were expressed in a manner really powerful and affecting. I should have thought it almost impossible to present such an idea so strongly on the stage, without the aid of speech.

Milan soon lay behind us, at five o'clock in the morning; and before the golden statue on the summit of the cathedral spire was lost in the blue sky, the Alps, stupendously confused in lofty peaks and ridges, clouds and snow, were towering in our path.

Still, we continued to advance towards them until nightfall; and, all day long, the mountain-tops presented strangely shifting shapes, as the road displayed them in different points of view. The beautiful day was just declining when we came upon the Lago Maggiore, with its lovely islands. For, however fanciful and fantastic the Isola Bella may be, and is, it still is beautiful. Anything springing out of that blue water, with that scenery around it, must be.

It was ten o'clock at night when we got to Domo d'Ossola, at the foot of the Pass of the Simplon. But as the moon was shining brightly, and there was not a cloud in the starlit sky, it was no time for going to bed, or going anywhere but on. So, we got a little carriage after some delay, and began the ascent.

It was late in November; and the snow lying four or five feet thick in the beaten road on the summit (in other parts the new drift was already deep), the air was piercing cold. But, the serenity of the night, and the grandeur of the road, with its impenetrable shadows, and deep glooms, and its sudden turns into the shining of the moon, and its incessant roar of falling water, rendered the journey more and more sublime at every step.

Soon leaving the calm Italian villages below us sleeping in the moonlight, the road began to wind among dark trees, and after a time emerged upon a barer region, very steep and toilsome, where the moon shone bright and high. By degrees, the roar of water grew louder; and the stupendous track, after crossing the torrent by a bridge, struck in between two massive perpendicular walls of rock that quite shut out the moonlight, and only left a few stars shining in the narrow strip of sky above. Then, even this was lost in the thick darkness of a cavern in the rock, through which the way was pierced; the terrible cataract thundering and roaring close below it, and its foam and spray hanging, in a mist, about the entrance. Emerging from this cave, and coming again into the moonlight, and across a dizzy bridge, it crept and twisted upward, through the Gorge of Gondo, savage and grand beyond description, with smooth-fronted precipices rising up on either hand, and almost meeting overhead. Thus we went, climbing on our rugged way, higher and higher all night, without a moment's weariness: lost in the contemplation of the black rocks, the tremendous heights and depths, the fields of smooth snow lying in the clefts and hollows, and the fierce torrents thundering headlong down the deep abyss.

Towards daybreak we came among the snow, where a keen wind was blowing fiercely. Having, with some trouble, awakened the inmates of a wooden house in this solitude: round which the wind was howling dismally, catching up the snow in wreaths, and hurling it away: we got some breakfast in a room built of rough timbers, but well warmed by a stove, and well contrived (as it had need to be) for keeping out the bitter storms. A sledge being then made ready, and four horses harnessed to it, we went ploughing through the snow. Still upward, but now in the cold light of morning, and with the great white desert on which we travelled plain and clear.

We were well upon the summit of the mountain: and had before us the rude cross of wood, denoting its greatest altitude above the sea: when the light of the rising sun struck, all at once, upon the waste of snow, and turned it a deep red. The lonely grandeur of the scene was then at its height.

As we went sledging on, there came out of the Hospice founded by Napoleon a group of Peasant travellers, with staves and knapsacks, who had rested there last night: attended by a Monk or two, their hospitable entertainers, trudging slowly forward with them, for company's sake. It was pleasant to give them good morning, and pretty, looking back a long way after them, to see them looking back at us, and hesitating presently, when one of our horses stumbled and fell, whether or no they should return and help us. But he was soon up again, with the assistance of a rough waggoner whose team had stuck fast there too; and when we had helped him out of his difficulty, in return, we left him slowly ploughing towards them, and went softly and swiftly forward, on the brink of a steep precipice, among the mountain pines.

Taking to our wheels again soon afterwards, we began rapidly to descend; passing under everlasting glaciers, by means of arched galleries, hung with clusters of dripping icicles; under and over foaming water-falls; near places of refuge, and galleries of shelter against sudden danger; through caverns over whose arched roofs the avalanches slide in spring, and bury themselves

in the unknown gulf beneath. Down, over lofty bridges, and through horrible ravines: a little shifting speck in the vast desolation of ice and snow, and monstrous granite rocks: down through the deep Gorge of the Saltine, and deafened by the torrent plunging madly down among the riven blocks of rock, into the level country far below. Gradually down, by zigzag roads, lying between an upward and a downward precipice, into warmer weather, calmer air, and softer scenery, until there lay before us, glittering like gold or silver in the thaw and sunshine, the metal-covered, red, green, yellow domes and church spires of a Swiss town.

The business of these recollections being with Italy, and my business, consequently, being to scamper back thither as fast as possible, I will not recall (though I am sorely tempted) how the Swiss villages, clustered at the feet of Giant mountains, looked like playthings; or how confusedly the houses were heaped and piled together; or how there were very narrow streets to shut the howling winds out in the winter-time; and broken bridges, which the impetuous torrents, suddenly released in spring, had swept away. Or how there were peasant women here with great round fur caps: looking, when they peeped out of casements and only their heads were seen, like a population of Sword-bearers to the Lord Mayor of London; or how the town of Vevay, lying on the smooth Lake of Geneva, was beautiful to see; or how the statue of St. Peter, in the street at Fribourg, grasps the largest key that ever was beheld; or how Fribourg is illustrious for its two suspension bridges, and its grand cathedral organ.

Or how, between that town and Bâle, the road meandered among thriving villages of wooden cottages, with overhanging thatched roofs, and low protruding windows, glazed with small round panes of glass like crown-pieces; or how, in every little Swiss homestead, with its cart or waggon carefully stowed away beside the house, its little garden, stock of poultry, and groups of red-cheeked children, there was an air of comfort, very new and very pleasant after Italy; or how the dresses of the women changed again, and there were no more sword-bearers to be seen; and fair white stomachers, and great black, fan-shaped, gauzy-looking caps prevailed instead.

Or how the country by the Jura Mountains, sprinkled with snow, and lighted by the moon, and musical with falling water, was delightful; or how, below the windows of the great hotel of the Three Kings at Bâle, the swollen Rhine ran fast and green: or how, at Strasbourg, it was quite as fast, but not as green: and was said to be foggy lower down: and, at that late time of the year, was a far less certain means of progress than the highway road to Paris.

Or how Strasbourg itself, in its magnificent old Gothic Cathedral, and its ancient houses with their peaked roofs and gables, made a little gallery of quaint and interesting views; or how a crowd was gathered inside the cathedral at noon to see the famous mechanical clock in motion, striking twelve. How, when it struck twelve, a whole army of puppets went through many ingenious evolutions; and, among them, a huge puppet-cock, perched on the top, crowed twelve times, loud and clear. Or how it was wonderful to see this cock at great pains to clap its wings, and strain its throat; but obviously having no connection whatever with its own voice; which was deep within the clock, a long way down.

Or how the road to Paris was one sea of mud; and thence to the coast, a little better for a hard frost. Or how the cliffs of Dover were a pleasant sight, and England was so wonderfully neat —though dark, and lacking colour on a winter's day, it must be conceded.

Or how, a few days afterwards, it was cool, recrossing the Channel, with ice upon the decks, and snow lying pretty deep in France. Or how the Malle Poste scrambled through the snow, headlong, drawn in the hilly parts by any number of stout horses at a canter; or how there were, outside the Post Office Yard in Paris, before daybreak, extraordinary adventurers in heaps of rags, groping in the snowy streets with little rakes, in search of odds and ends.

Or how, between Paris and Marseilles, the snow being then exceeding deep, a thaw came on, and the mail waded rather than rolled for the next three hundred miles or so; breaking springs on Sunday nights, and putting out its two passengers to warm and refresh themselves, pending the repairs, in miserable billiard-rooms, where hairy company, collected about stoves, were playing cards; the cards being very like themselves—extremely limp and dirty.

Or how there was detention at Marseilles from stress of weather; and steamers were advertised to go, which did not go; or how the good steam-packet Charlemagne at length put out, and met such weather that now she threatened to run into Toulon, and now into Nice, but, the wind moderating, did neither, but ran on into Genoa harbour instead, where the familiar Bells rang sweetly in my ear. Or how there was a travelling party on board, of whom one member was very ill in the cabin next to mine, and, being ill, was cross, and therefore declined

to give up the Dictionary, which he kept under his pillow; thereby obliging his companions to come down to him constantly, to ask what was the Italian for a lump of sugar—a glass of brandy-and-water—what's o'clock? and so forth: which he always insisted on looking out with his own sea-sick eyes, declining to intrust the book to any man alive.

Like GRUMIO, I might have told you in detail, all this and something more—but to as little purpose—were I not deterred by the remembrance that my business is with Italy. Therefore, like GRUMIO's story, it "shall die in oblivion."

TO ROME BY PISA AND SIENA.

THERE is nothing in Italy more beautiful to me than the coast road between Genoa and Spezzia. On one side: sometimes far below, sometimes nearly on a level with the road, and often skirted by broken rocks of many shapes: there is the free blue sea, with here and there a picturesque felucca gliding slowly on; on the other side are lofty hills, ravines besprinkled with white cottages, patches of dark olive woods, country churches with their light open towers, and country houses gaily painted. On every bank and knoll by the wayside, the wild cactus and aloe flourish in exuberant profusion; and the gardens of the bright villages along the road are seen, all blushing in the summer-time with clusters of the belladonna, and are fragrant in the autumn and winter with golden oranges and lemons.

Some of the villages are inhabited, almost exclusively, by fishermen; and it is pleasant to see their great boats hauled up on the beach, making little patches of shade, where they lie asleep, or where the women and children sit romping and looking out to sea, while they mend their nets upon the shore. There is one town, Camoglia, with its little harbour on the sea, hundreds of feet below the road: where families of mariners live, who, time out of mind, have owned coasting vessels in that place, and have traded to Spain and elsewhere. Seen from the road above, it is like a tiny model on the margin of the dimpled water, shining in the sun. Descended into by the winding mule tracks, it is a perfect miniature of a primitive seafaring town; the saltest, roughest, most piratical little place that ever was seen. Great rusty iron rings and mooring chains, capstans, and fragments of old masts and spars, choke up the way; hardy rough-weather boats, and seamen's clothing, flutter in the little harbour, or are drawn out on the sunny stones to dry; on the parapet of the rude pier a few amphibious-looking fellows lie asleep, with their legs dangling over the wall, as though earth or water were all one to them, and if they slipped in, they would float away, dozing comfortably among the fishes; the church is bright with trophies of the sea, and votive offerings, in commemoration of escape from storm and shipwreck. The dwellings not immediately abutting on the harbour are approached by blind low archways, and by crooked steps, as if in darkness and in difficulty of access they should be like holds of ships, or inconvenient cabins under water; and everywhere there is a smell of fish, and seaweed, and old rope.

The coast road, whence Camoglia is descried so far below, is famous in the warm season, especially in some parts near Genoa, for fireflies. Walking there on a dark night, I have seen it made one sparkling firmament by these beautiful insects; so that the distant stars were pale against the flash and glitter that spangled every olive wood and hill-side, and pervaded the whole air.

It was not in such a season, however, that we traversed this road on our way to Rome. The middle of January was only just past, and it was very gloomy and dark weather; very wet besides. In crossing the fine Pass of Bracco, we encountered such a storm of mist and rain, that we travelled in a cloud the whole way. There might have been no Mediterranean in the world, for anything we saw of it there, except when a sudden gust of wind, clearing the mist before it for a moment, showed the agitated sea at a great depth below, lashing the distant rocks, and spouting up its foam furiously. The rain was incessant; every brook and torrent was greatly swollen; and such a deafening leaping, and roaring, and thundering of water, I never heard the like of in my life.

Hence, when we came to Spezzia, we found that the Magra, an unbridged river on the high-road to Pisa, was too high to be safely crossed in the Ferry Boat, and were fain to wait until the afternoon of next day, when it had, in some degree, subsided. Spezzia, however, is a good place to tarry at; by reason, firstly, of its beautiful bay; secondly, of its ghostly Inn; thirdly, of the head-dress of the women, who wear, on one side of their head, a small doll's straw hat, stuck on to the hair; which is certainly the oddest and most roguish head-gear that ever was invented.

The Magra safely crossed in the Ferry Boat —the passage is not by any means agreeable when the current is swollen and strong—we arrived at Carrara within a few hours. In good time next morning we got some ponies, and went out to see the marble quarries.

They are four or five great glens, running up into a range of lofty hills, until they can run no longer, and are stopped by being abruptly strangled by Nature. The quarries, or "caves," as they call them there, are so many openings, high up in the hills, on either side of these passes, where they blast and excavate for marble: which may turn out good or bad: may make a man's fortune very quickly, or ruin him by the great expense of working what is worth nothing. Some of these caves were opened by the ancient Romans, and remain as they left them to this hour. Many others are being worked at this moment: others are to be begun to-morrow, next week, next month; others are unbought, unthought of; and marble enough for more ages than have passed since the place was resorted to, lies hidden everywhere: patiently awaiting its time of discovery.

As you toil and clamber up one of these steep gorges (having left your pony soddening his girths in water, a mile or two lower down) you hear, every now and then, echoing among the hills, in a low tone, more silent than the previous silence, a melancholy warning bugle, —a signal to the miners to withdraw. Then, there is a thundering, and echoing from hill to hill, and perhaps a splashing up of great fragments of rock into the air; and on you toil again until some other bugle sounds in a new direction, and you stop directly, lest you should come within the range of the new explosion.

There were numbers of men, working high up in these hills—on the sides—clearing away, and sending down the broken masses of stone and earth, to make way for the blocks of marble that had been discovered. As these came rolling down from unseen hands into the narrow valley, I could not help thinking of the deep glen (just the same sort of glen) where the Roc left Sinbad the Sailor; and where the merchants, from the heights above, flung down great pieces of meat for the diamonds to stick to. There were no eagles here to darken the sun in their swoop, and pounce upon them; but it was as wild and fierce as if there had been hundreds.

But the road, the road down which the marble comes, however immense the blocks! The genius of the country, and the spirit of its institutions, pave that road: repair it, watch it, keep it going! Conceive a channel of water running over a rocky bed, beset with great heaps of stone of all shapes and sizes, winding down the middle of this valley; and *that* being the road—because it was the road five hundred years ago! Imagine the clumsy carts of five hundred years ago being used to this hour, and drawn, as they used to be five hundred years ago, by oxen, whose ancestors were worn to death five hundred years ago, as their unhappy descendants are now, in twelve months, by the suffering and agony of this cruel work! Two pair, four pair, ten pair, twenty pair, to one block, according to its size; down it must come, this way. In their struggling from stone to stone, with their enormous loads behind them, they die frequently upon the spot; and not they alone; for their passionate drivers, sometimes tumbling down in their energy, are crushed to death beneath the wheels. But it was good five hundred years ago, and it must be good now: and a railroad down one of these steeps (the easiest thing in the world) would be flat blasphemy.

When we stood aside, to see one of these cars drawn by only a pair of oxen (for it had but one small block of marble on it) coming down, I hailed, in my heart, the man who sat upon the heavy yoke, to keep it on the neck of the poor beasts—and who faced backward: not before him—as the very Devil of true despotism. He had a great rod in his hand, with an iron point; and when they could plough and force their way through the loose bed of the torrent no longer, and came to a stop, he poked it into their bodies, beat it on their heads, screwed it round and round in their nostrils, got them on a yard or two in the madness of intense pain; repeated all these persuasions, with increased intensity of purpose, when they stopped again; got them on once more; forced and goaded them to an abrupter point of the descent; and when their writhing and smarting, and the weight behind them, bore them plunging down the precipice in a cloud of scattered water, whirled his rod above his head, and gave a great whoop and halloo, as if he had achieved something, and had no idea that they might shake him off, and blindly mash his brains upon the road, in the noontide of his triumph.

Standing in one of the many studii of Carrara that afternoon—for it is a great workshop, full of beautifully-finished copies in marble of almost every figure, group, and bust we know—it seemed, at first, so strange to me that those exquisite shapes, replete with grace, and thought, and delicate repose, should grow out

of all this toil, and sweat, and torture! But I soon found a parallel to it, and an explanation of it, in every virtue that springs up in miserable ground, and every good thing that has its birth in sorrow and distress. And, looking out of the sculptor's great window upon the marble mountains, all red and glowing in the decline of day, but stern and solemn to the last, I thought, My God! how many quarries of human hearts and souls, capable of far more beautiful results, are left shut up and mouldering away: while pleasure-travellers through life avert their faces as they pass, and shudder at the gloom and ruggedness that conceal them!

The then reigning Duke of Modena, to whom this territory in part belonged, claimed the proud distinction of being the only sovereign in Europe who had not recognised Louis Philippe as King of the French! He was not a wag, but quite in earnest. He was also much opposed to railroads; and if certain lines in contemplation by other potentates, on either side of him, had been executed, would have probably enjoyed the satisfaction of having an omnibus plying to and fro, across his not very vast dominions, to forward travellers from one terminus to another.

Carrara, shut in by great hills, is very picturesque and bold. Few tourists stay there; and the people are nearly all connected, in one way or other, with the working of marble. There are also villages among the caves, where the workmen live. It contains a beautiful little Theatre, newly built: and it is an interesting custom there to form the chorus of labourers in the marble quarries, who are self-taught, and sing by ear. I heard them in a comic opera, and in an act of *Norma;* and they acquitted themselves very well; unlike the common people of Italy generally, who (with some exceptions among the Neapolitans) sing vilely out of tune, and have very disagreeable singing voices.

From the summit of a lofty hill beyond Carrara, the first view of the fertile plain in which the town of Pisa lies—with Leghorn, a purple spot in the flat distance—is enchanting. Nor is it only distance that lends enchantment to the view; for the fruitful country, and rich woods of olive-trees through which the road subsequently passes, render it delightful.

The moon was shining when we approached Pisa, and for a long time we could see, behind the wall, the leaning Tower, all awry in the uncertain light; the shadowy original of the old pictures in school-books, setting forth "The Wonders of the World." Like most things connected in their first associations with school-books and school-times, it was too small. I felt it keenly. It was nothing like so high above the wall as I had hoped. It was another of the many deceptions practised by Mr. Harris, Bookseller, at the corner of St. Paul's Churchyard, London. *His* Tower was a fiction, but this was reality—and, by comparison, a short reality. Still, it looked very well, and very strange, and was quite as much out of the perpendicular as Harris had represented it to be. The quiet air of Pisa, too; the big guard-house at the gate, with only two little soldiers in it; the streets, with scarcely any show of people in them; and the Arno, flowing quaintly through the centre of the town; were excellent. So, I bore no malice in my heart against Mr. Harris (remembering his good intentions), but forgave him before dinner, and went out, full of confidence, to see the Tower next morning.

I might have known better; but, somehow, I had expected to see it casting its long shadow on a public street where people came and went all day. It was a surprise to me to find it in a grave, retired place, apart from the general resort, and carpeted with smooth green turf. But, the group of buildings clustered on and about this verdant carpet: comprising the Tower, the Baptistery, the Cathedral, and the Church of the Campo Santo: is perhaps the most remarkable and beautiful in the whole world: and, from being clustered there together, away from the ordinary transactions and details of the town, they have a singularly venerable and impressive character. It is the architectural essence of a rich old city, with all its common life and common habitations pressed out, and filtered away.

SIMOND compares the Tower to the usual pictorial representations in children's books of the Tower of Babel. It is a happy simile, and conveys a better idea of the building than chapters of laboured description. Nothing can exceed the grace and lightness of the structure; nothing can be more remarkable than its general appearance. In the course of the ascent to the top (which is by an easy staircase), the inclination is not very apparent; but, at the summit, it becomes so, and gives one the sensation of being in a ship that has heeled over, through the action of an ebb tide. The effect *upon the low side*, so to speak—looking over from the gallery, and seeing the shaft recede to its base—is very startling; and I saw a nervous traveller hold on to the Tower involuntarily, after glancing down, as if he had some idea of propping it up. The view within, from the ground—looking up, as through a slanted tube—is also very curious. It certainly inclines as much as the most sanguine tourist could desire. The natural impulse of

ninety-nine people out of a hundred, who were about to recline upon the grass below it to rest, and contemplate the adjacent buildings, would probably be, not to take up their position under the leaning side; it is so very much aslant.

The manifold beauties of the Cathedral and Baptistery need no recapitulation from me; though in this case, as in a hundred others, I find it difficult to separate my own delight in recalling them from your weariness in having them recalled. There is a picture of St. Agnes, by Andrea del Sarto, in the former, and there are a variety of rich columns in the latter, that tempt me strongly.

It is, I hope, no breach of my resolution not to be tempted into elaborate descriptions, to remember the Campo Santo; where grass-grown graves are dug in earth brought more than six hundred years ago from the Holy Land; and where there are, surrounding them, such cloisters, with such playing lights and shadows falling through their delicate tracery on the stone pavement, as surely the dullest memory could never forget. On the walls of this solemn and lovely place are ancient frescoes, very much obliterated and decayed, but very curious. As usually happens in almost any collection of paintings, of any sort, in Italy, where there are many heads, there is, in one of them, a striking accidental likeness of Napoleon. At one time, I used to please my fancy with the speculation whether these old painters, at their work, had a foreboding knowledge of the man who would one day arise to wreak such destruction upon art: whose soldiers would make targets of great pictures, and stable their horses among triumphs of architecture. But the same Corsican face is so plentiful in some parts of Italy at this day, that a more commonplace solution of the coincidence is unavoidable.

If Pisa be the seventh wonder of the world in right of its Tower, it may claim to be, at least, the second or third in right of its beggars. They waylay the unhappy visitor at every turn, escort him to every door he enters at, and lie in wait for him, with strong reinforcements, at every door by which they know he must come out. The grating of the portal on its hinges is the signal for a general shout, and the moment he appears, he is hemmed in, and fallen on, by heaps of rags and personal distortions. The beggars seem to embody all the trade and enterprise of Pisa. Nothing else is stirring but warm air. Going through the streets, the fronts of the sleepy houses look like backs. They are all so still and quiet, and unlike houses with people in them, that the greater part of the city has the appearance of a city at daybreak, or during a general siesta of the population. Or it is yet more like those backgrounds of houses in common prints, or old engravings, where windows and doors are squarely indicated, and one figure (a beggar of course) is seen walking off by itself into illimitable perspective.

Not so Leghorn (made illustrious by SMOLLETT'S grave): which is a thriving, business-like, matter-of-fact place, where idleness is shouldered out of the way by commerce. The regulations observed there, in reference to trade and merchants, are very liberal and free; and the town, of course, benefits by them. Leghorn has a bad name in connection with stabbers, and with some justice, it must be allowed; for, not many years ago, there was an assassination club there, the members of which bore no ill-will to anybody in particular, but stabbed people (quite strangers to them) in the streets at night, for the pleasure and excitement of the recreation. I think the president of this amiable society was a shoemaker. He was taken, however, and the club was broken up. It would, probably, have disappeared in the natural course of events, before the railroad between Leghorn and Pisa, which is a good one, and has already begun to astonish Italy with a precedent of punctuality, order, plain dealing, and improvement—the most dangerous and heretical astonisher of all. There must have been a slight sensation, as of earthquake, surely, in the Vatican, when the first Italian railroad was thrown open.

Returning to Pisa, and hiring a good-tempered Vetturino, and his four horses, to take us on to Rome, we travelled through pleasant Tuscan villages and cheerful scenery all day. The roadside crosses in this part of Italy are numerous and curious. There is seldom a figure on the cross, though there is sometimes a face; but they are remarkable for being garnished with little models, in wood, of every possible object that can be connected with the Saviour's death. The cock that crowed when Peter had denied his Master thrice is usually perched on the tiptop; and an ornithological phenomenon he generally is. Under him is the inscription. Then, hung on to the crossbeam, are the spear, the reed with the sponge of vinegar and water at the end, the coat without seam for which the soldiers cast lots, the dice-box with which they threw for it, the hammer that drove in the nails, the pincers that pulled them out, the ladder which was set against the cross, the crown of thorns, the instrument of flagellation, the lantern with which Mary went to the tomb (I suppose), and the sword with which Peter smote the ser-

vant of the high priest,—a perfect toy-shop of little objects, repeated at every four or five miles, all along the highway.

On the evening of the second day from Pisa we reached the beautiful old city of Siena. There was what they called a Carnival in progress; but, as its secret lay in a score or two of melancholy people walking up and down the principal street in common toy-shop masks, and being more melancholy, if possible, than the same sort of people in England, I say no more of it. We went off betimes, next morning, to see the Cathedral, which is wonderfully picturesque inside and out, especially the latter—also the market-place, or great Piazza, which is a large square, with a great broken-nosed fountain in it: some quaint Gothic houses: and a high square brick tower; *outside* the top of which—a curious feature in such views in Italy—hangs an enormous bell. It is like a bit of Venice, without the water. There are some curious old Palazzi in the town, which is very ancient; and without having (for me) the interest of Verona or Genoa, it is very dreamy and fantastic, and most interesting.

We went on again as soon as we had seen these things, and going over a rather bleak country (there had been nothing but vines until now: mere walking-sticks at that season of the year), stopped, as usual, between one and two hours in the middle of the day, to rest the horses; that being a part of every Vetturino contract. We then went on again, through a region gradually becoming bleaker and wilder, until it became as bare and desolate as any Scottish moors. Soon after dark we halted for the night, at the osteria of La Scala: a perfectly lone house, where the family were sitting round a great fire in the kitchen, raised on a stone platform three or four feet high, and big enough for the roasting of an ox. On the upper, and only other floor of this hotel, there was a great wild rambling sala, with one very little window in a by-corner, and four black doors opening into four black bedrooms in various directions. To say nothing of another large black door, opening into another large black sala, with the staircase coming abruptly through a kind of trap-door in the floor, and the rafters of the roof looming above: a suspicious little press skulking in one obscure corner: and all the knives in the house lying about in various directions. The fireplace was of the purest Italian architecture, so that it was perfectly impossible to see it for the smoke. The waitress was like a dramatic brigand's wife, and wore the same style of dress upon her head. The dogs barked like mad; the echoes returned the compliments bestowed upon them; there was not another house within twelve miles; and things had a dreary, and rather a cut-throat appearance.

They were not improved by rumours of robbers having come out, strong and boldly, within a few nights; and of their having stopped the mail very near that place. They were known to have waylaid some travellers not long before, on Mount Vesuvius itself, and were the talk at all the roadside inns. As they were no business of ours, however (for we had very little with us to lose), we made ourselves merry on the subject, and were very soon as comfortable as need be. We had the usual dinner in this solitary house; and a very good dinner it is, when you are used to it. There is something with a vegetable or some rice in it, which is a sort of shorthand or arbitrary character for soup, and which tastes very well, when you have flavoured it with plenty of grated cheese, lots of salt, and abundance of pepper. There is the half fowl of which this soup has been made. There is a stewed pigeon, with the gizzards and livers of himself and other birds stuck all round him. There is a bit of roast beef, the size of a small French roll. There are a scrap of Parmesan cheese, and five little withered apples, all huddled together on a small plate, and crowding one upon the other, as if each were trying to save itself from the chance of being eaten. Then there is coffee; and then there is bed. You don't mind brick floors; you don't mind yawning doors, nor banging windows; you don't mind your own horses being stabled under the bed: and so close that, every time a horse coughs or sneezes, he wakes you. If you are good-humoured to the people about you, and speak pleasantly, and look cheerful, take my word for it you may be well entertained in the very worst Italian Inn, and always in the most obliging manner, and may go from one end of the country to the other (despite all stories to the contrary) without any great trial of your patience anywhere. Especially, when you get such wine in flasks as the Orvieto and the Monte Pulciano.

It was a bad morning when we left this place; and we went, for twelve miles, over a country as barren, as stony, and as wild as Cornwall in England, until we came to Radicofani, where there is a ghostly, goblin inn: once a hunting-seat, belonging to the Dukes of Tuscany. It is full of such rambling corridors and gaunt rooms, that all the murdering and phantom tales that ever were written might have originated in that one house. There are some horrible old Palazzi

in Genoa: one in particular, not unlike it, outside: but there is a windy, creaking, wormy, rustling, door-opening, foot-on-staircase-falling character about this Radicofani Hotel, such as I never saw anywhere else. The town, such as it is, hangs on a hill-side above the house, and in front of it. The inhabitants are all beggars; and, as soon as they see a carriage coming, they swoop down upon it, like so many birds of prey.

When we got on the mountain pass which lies beyond this place, the wind (as they had forewarned us at the inn) was so terrific, that we were obliged to take my other half out of the carriage, lest she should be blown over, carriage and all, and to hang to it, on the windy side (as well as we could for laughing), to prevent its going, Heaven knows where. For mere force of wind, this land storm might have competed with an Atlantic gale, and had a reasonable chance of coming off victorious. The blast came sweeping down great gullies in a range of mountains on the right: so that we looked with positive awe at a great morass on the left, and saw that there was not a bush or twig to hold by. It seemed as if, once blown from our feet, we must be swept out to sea, or away into space. There was snow, and hail, and rain, and lightning, and thunder; and there were rolling mists, travelling with incredible velocity. It was dark, awful, and solitary to the last degree; there were mountains above mountains, veiled in angry clouds; and there was such a wrathful, rapid, violent, tumultuous hurry everywhere, as rendered the scene unspeakably exciting and grand.

It was a relief to get out of it, notwithstanding; and to cross even the dismal, dirty Papal Frontier. After passing through two little towns; in one of which, Acquapendente, there was also a "Carnival" in progress: consisting of one man dressed and masked as a woman, and one woman dressed and masked as a man, walking, ankle deep, through the muddy streets, in a very melancholy manner: we came, at dusk, within sight of the Lake of Bolsena, on whose bank there is a little town of the same name, much celebrated for malaria. With the exception of this poor place, there is not a cottage on the banks of the lake, or near it (for nobody dare sleep there); not a boat upon its waters; not a stick or stake to break the dismal monotony of seven-and-twenty watery miles. We were late in getting in, the roads being very bad from heavy rains; and, after dark, the dulness of the scene was quite intolerable.

We entered on a very different and a finer scene of desolation, next night, at sunset. We had passed through Montefiaschone (famous for its wine) and Viterbo (for its fountains): and, after climbing up a long hill of eight or ten miles extent, came suddenly upon the margin of a solitary lake: in one part very beautiful, with a luxuriant wood; in another, very barren, and shut in by bleak volcanic hills. Where this lake flows, there stood, of old, a city. It was swallowed up one day; and, in its stead, this water rose. There are ancient traditions (common to many parts of the world) of the ruined city having been seen below, when the water was clear; but, however that may be, from this spot of earth it vanished. The ground came bubbling up above it; and the water too; and here they stand, like ghosts on whom the other world closed suddenly, and who have no means of getting back again. They seem to be waiting the course of ages, for the next earthquake in that place; when they will plunge below the ground at its first yawning, and be seen no more. The unhappy city below is not more lost and dreary than these fire-charred hills and the stagnant water above. The red sun looked strangely on them, as with the knowledge that they were made for caverns and darkness; and the melancholy water oozed and sucked the mud, and crept quietly among the marshy grass and reeds, as if the overthrow of all the ancient towers and housetops, and the death of all the ancient people born and bred there, were yet heavy on its conscience.

A short ride from this lake brought us to Ronciglione; a little town like a large pigsty, where we passed the night. Next morning, at seven o'clock, we started for Rome.

As soon as we were out of the pigsty, we entered on the Campagna Romana; an undulating flat (as you know), where few people can live: and where, for miles and miles, there is nothing to relieve the terrible monotony and gloom. Of all kinds of country that could, by possibility, lie outside the gates of Rome, this is the aptest and fittest burial-ground for the Dead City. So sad, so quiet, so sullen; so secret in its covering up of great masses of ruin, and hiding them; so like the waste places into which the men possessed with devils used to go and howl, and rend themselves, in the old days of Jerusalem. We had to traverse thirty miles of this Campagna; and for two-and-twenty we went on and on, seeing nothing but now and then a lonely house, or a villainous-looking shepherd, with matted hair all over his face, and himself wrapped to the chin in a frouzy brown mantle, tending his sheep. At the end of that distance, we stopped to refresh the horses, and to get some lunch, in a

common malaria-shaken, despondent little public-house, whose every inch of wall and beam, inside, was (according to custom) painted and decorated in a way so miserable that every room looked like the wrong side of another room, and, with its wretched imitation of drapery, and lopsided little daubs of lyres, seemed to have been plundered from behind the scenes of some travelling circus.

When we were fairly off again, we began, in a perfect fever, to strain our eyes for Rome; and when, after another mile or two, the Eternal City appeared, at length, in the distance, it looked like—I am half afraid to write the word—like LONDON!!! There it lay, under a thick cloud, with innumerable towers, and steeples, and roofs of houses, rising up into the sky, and, high above them all, one Dome. I swear, that keenly as I felt the seeming absurdity of the comparison, it was so like London, at that distance, that if you could have shown it me in a glass, I should have taken it for nothing else.

ROME.

WE entered the Eternal City at about four o'clock in the afternoon, on the thirtieth of January, by the Porta del Popolo, and came immediately—it was a dark, muddy day, and there had been heavy rain—on the skirts of the Carnival. We did not, then, know that we were only looking at the fag-end of the masks, who were driving slowly round and round the Piazza, until they could find a promising opportunity for falling into the stream of carriages, and getting, in good time, into the thick of the festivity: and coming among them so abruptly, all travel-stained and weary, was not coming very well prepared to enjoy the scene.

We had crossed the Tiber by the Ponte Molle, two or three miles before. It had looked as yellow as it ought to look, and hurrying on between its worn-away and miry banks, had a promising aspect of desolation and ruin. The masquerade dresses on the fringe of the Carnival did great violence to this promise. There were no great ruins, no solemn tokens of antiquity to be seen;—they all lie on the other side of the city. There seemed to be long streets of commonplace shops and houses, such as are to be found in any European town; there were busy people, equipages, ordinary walkers to and fro; a multitude of chattering strangers. It was no more *my* Rome; the Rome of anybody's fancy, man or boy: degraded and fallen, and lying asleep in the sun among a heap of ruins: than the Place de la Concorde in Paris is. A cloudy sky, a dull cold rain, and muddy streets, I was prepared for, but not for this: and I confess to having gone to bed, that night, in a very indifferent humour, and with a very considerably quenched enthusiasm.

Immediately on going out next day, we hurried off to St. Peter's. It looked immense in the distance, but distinctly and decidedly small, by comparison, on a near approach. The beauty of the Piazza in which it stands, with its clusters of exquisite columns, and its gushing fountains—so fresh, so broad, and free, and beautiful—nothing can exaggerate. The first burst of the interior, in all its expansive majesty and glory: and, most of all, the looking up into the Dome: is a sensation never to be forgotten. But, there were preparations for a Festa; the pillars of stately marble were swathed in some impertinent frippery of red and yellow; the altar, and entrance to the subterranean chapel: which is before it, in the centre of the church: were like a goldsmith's shop, or one of the opening scenes in a very lavish pantomime. And though I had as high a sense of the beauty of the building (I hope) as it is possible to entertain, I felt no very strong emotion. I have been infinitely more affected in many English cathedrals when the organ has been playing, and in many English country churches when the congregation have been singing. I had a much greater sense of mystery and wonder in the Cathedral of San Mark, at Venice.

When we came out of the church again (we stood nearly an hour staring up into the dome, and would not have "gone over" the Cathedral then for any money), we said to the coachman, "Go to the Coliseum." In a quarter of an hour or so, he stopped at the gate, and we went in.

It is no fiction, but plain, sober, honest Truth, to say: so suggestive and distinct is it at this hour: that, for a moment—actually in passing in—they who will, may have the whole great pile before them, as it used to be, with thousands of eager faces staring down into the arena, and such a whirl of strife, and blood, and dust, going on there, as no language can describe. Its solitude, its awful beauty, and its utter desolation strike upon the stranger, the next moment, like a softened sorrow; and never in his life, perhaps, will he be so moved and overcome by any sight, not immediately connected with his own affections and afflictions.

To see it crumbling there, an inch a year; its walls and arches overgrown with green; its corridors open to the day; the long grass growing in its porches; young trees of yesterday springing up on its ragged parapets, and bearing fruit: chance produce of the seeds dropped there by the birds who build their nests within its chinks and crannies; to see its Pit of Fight filled up with earth, and the peaceful Cross planted in the centre; to climb into its upper halls, and look down on ruin, ruin, ruin, all about it; the triumphal arches of Constantine, Septimus Severus, and Titus; the Roman Forum; the Palace of the Cæsars; the temples of the old religion, fallen down and gone; is to see the ghost of old Rome, wicked, wonderful old city, haunting the very ground on which its people trod. It is the most impressive, the most stately, the most solemn, grand, majestic, mournful sight conceivable. Never, in its bloodiest prime, can the sight of the gigantic Coliseum, full and running over with the lustiest life, have moved one heart, as it must move all who look upon it now, a ruin. GOD be thanked: a ruin!

As it tops the other ruins: standing there, a mountain among graves: so do its ancient influences outlive all other remnants of the old mythology and old butchery of Rome, in the nature of the fierce and cruel Roman people. The Italian face changes as the visitor approaches the city; its beauty becomes devilish; and there is scarcely one countenance in a hundred, among the common people in the streets, that would not be at home and happy in a renovated Coliseum to-morrow.

Here was Rome indeed at last; and such a Rome as no one can imagine in its full and awful grandeur! We wandered out upon the Appian Way, and then went on, through miles of ruined tombs and broken walls, with here and there a desolate and uninhabited house: past the Circus of Romulus, where the course of the chariots, the stations of the judges, competitors, and spectators are yet as plainly to be seen as in old time: past the Tomb of Cecilia Metella: past all enclosure, hedge, or stake, wall or fence: away upon the open Campagna, where, on that side of Rome, nothing is to be beheld but Ruin. Except where the distant Apennines bound the view upon the left, the whole wide prospect is one field of ruin. Broken aqueducts, left in the most picturesque and beautiful clusters of arches; broken temples; broken tombs. A desert of decay, sombre and desolate beyond all expression; and with a history in every stone that strews the ground.

On Sunday the Pope assisted in the performance of High Mass at St. Peter's. The effect of the Cathedral on my mind, on that second visit, was exactly what it was at first, and what it remains after many visits. It is not religiously impressive or affecting. It is an immense edifice, with no one point for the mind to rest upon; and it tires itself with wandering round and round. The very purpose of the place is not expressed in anything you see there, unless you examine its details—and all examination of details is incompatible with the place itself. It might be a Pantheon, or a Senate House, or a great architectural trophy, having no other object than an architectural triumph. There is a black statue of St. Peter, to be sure, under a red canopy; which is larger than life, and which is constantly having its great toe kissed by good Catholics. You cannot help seeing that: it is so very prominent and popular. But it does not heighten the effect of the temple as a work of art; and it is not expressive—to me, at least—of its high purpose.

A large space behind the altar was fitted up with boxes, shaped like those at the Italian Opera in England, but in their decoration much more gaudy. In the centre of the kind of theatre thus railed off was a canopied dais with the Pope's chair upon it. The pavement was covered with a carpet of the brightest green; and what with this green, and the intolerable reds and crimsons, and gold borders of the hangings, the whole concern looked like a stupendous Bonbon. On either side of the altar was a large box for lady strangers. These were filled with ladies in black dresses and black veils. The gentlemen of the Pope's guard, in red coats, leather breeches, and jack-boots, guarded all this reserved space, with drawn swords that were very flashy in every sense; and, from the altar all down the nave, a broad lane was kept clear by the Pope's Swiss Guard, who wear a quaint striped surcoat, and striped tight legs, and carry halberds like those which are usually shouldered by those theatrical supernumeraries, who never *can* get off the stage fast enough, and who may be generally observed to linger in the enemy's camp after the open country, held by the opposite forces, has been split up the middle by a convulsion of Nature.

I got upon the border of the green carpet, in company with a great many other gentlemen attired in black (no other passport is necessary), and stood there, at my ease, during the performance of mass. The singers were in a crib

of wire-work (like a large meat-safe or bird-cage) in one corner; and sang most atrociously. All about the green carpet there was a slowly-moving crowd of people: talking to each other: staring at the Pope through eye-glasses: defrauding one another, in moments of partial curiosity, out of precarious seats on the bases of pillars: and grinning hideously at the ladies. Dotted here and there were little knots of friars (Francescani, or Cappuccini, in their coarse brown dresses and peaked hoods), making a strange contrast to the gaudy ecclesiastics of higher degree, and having their humility gratified to the utmost, by being shouldered about, and elbowed right and left, on all sides. Some of these had muddy sandals and umbrellas, and stained garments · having trudged in from the country. The faces of the greater part were as coarse and heavy as their dress; their dogged, stupid, monotonous stare at all the glory and splendour having something in it half miserable, and half ridiculous.

Upon the green carpet itself, and gathered round the altar, was a perfect army of cardinals and priests, in red, gold, purple, violet, white, and fine linen. Stragglers from these went to and fro among the crowd, conversing two and two, or giving and receiving introductions, and exchanging salutations; other functionaries in black gowns, and other functionaries in court dresses, were similarly engaged. In the midst of all these, and stealthy Jesuits creeping in and out, and the extreme restlessness of the Youth of England, who were perpetually wandering about, some few steady persons in black cassocks, who had knelt down with their faces to the wall, and were poring over their missals, became, unintentionally, a sort of humane man-traps, and with their own devout legs tripped up other people's by the dozen.

There was a great pile of candles lying down on the floor near me, which a very old man in a rusty black gown with an open-work tippet, like a summer ornament for a fire-place in tissue paper, made himself very busy in dispensing to all the ecclesiastics: one apiece. They loitered about with these for some time, under their arms like walking-sticks, or in their hands like truncheons. At a certain period of the ceremony, however, each carried his candle up to the Pope, laid it across his two knees to be blessed, took it back again, and filed off. This was done in a very attenuated procession, as you may suppose, and occupied a long time. Not because it takes long to bless a candle through and through, but because there were so many candles to be blessed. At last they were all blessed; and then they were all lighted; and then the Pope was taken up, chair and all, and carried round the church.

I must say that I never saw anything, out of November, so like the popular English commemoration of the fifth of that month. A bundle of matches and a lantern would have made it perfect. Nor did the Pope himself at all mar the resemblance, though he has a pleasant and venerable face; for, as this part of the ceremony makes him giddy and sick, he shuts his eyes when it is performed: and having his eyes shut, and a great mitre on his head, and his head itself wagging to and fro as they shook him in carrying, he looked as if his mask were going to tumble off. The two immense fans which are always borne, one on either side of him, accompanied him, of course, on this occasion. As they carried him along, he blessed the people with the mystic sign; and, as he passed them, they kneeled down. When he had made the round of the church, he was brought back again, and, if I am not mistaken, this performance was repeated, in the whole, three times. There was, certainly, nothing solemn or effective in it; and certainly very much that was droll and tawdry. But this remark applies to the whole ceremony, except the raising of the Host, when every man in the guard dropped on one knee instantly, and dashed his naked sword on the ground; which had a fine effect.

The next time I saw the Cathedral was some two or three weeks afterwards, when I climbed up into the ball; and then, the hangings being taken down, and the carpet taken up, but all the framework left, the remnants of these decorations looked like an exploded cracker.

The Friday and Saturday having been solemn Festa days, and Sunday being always a *dies non* in Carnival proceedings, we had looked forward, with some impatience and curiosity, to the beginning of the new week: Monday and Tuesday being the two last and best days of the Carnival.

On the Monday afternoon, at one or two o'clock, there began to be a great rattling of carriages into the courtyard of the hotel; a hurrying to and fro of all the servants in it; and, now and then, a swift shooting across some doorway or balcony of a straggling stranger in a fancy dress: not yet sufficiently well used to the same to wear it with confidence, and defy public opinion. All the carriages were open, and had the linings carefully covered with white cotton or calico, to prevent their proper decorations from being spoiled by the incessant pelting of

sugar-plums; and people were packing and cramming into every vehicle, as it waited for its occupants, enormous sacks, and basketsful of these confetti, together with such heaps of flowers, tied up in little nosegays, that some carriages were not only brimful of flowers, but literally running over: scattering, at every shake and jerk of the springs, some of their abundance on the ground. Not to be behindhand in these essential particulars, we caused two very respectable sacks of sugar-plums (each about three feet high) and a large clothes-basket full of flowers to be conveyed into our hired barouche with all speed. And from our place of observation, in one of the upper balconies of the hotel, we contemplated these arrangements with the liveliest satisfaction. The carriages now beginning to take up their company, and move away, we got into ours, and drove off too, armed with little wire masks for our faces; the sugar-plums, like Falstaff's adulterated sack, having lime in their composition.

The Corso is a street a mile long; a street of shops, and palaces, and private houses, sometimes opening into a broad piazza. There are verandas and balconies, of all shapes and sizes, to almost every house—not on one story alone, but often to one room or another on every story—put there, in general, with so little order or regularity, that if, year after year, and season after season, it had rained balconies, hailed balconies, snowed balconies, blown balconies, they could scarcely have come into existence in a more disorderly manner.

This is the great fountain-head and focus of the Carnival. But all the streets in which the Carnival is held, being vigilantly kept by dragoons, it is necessary for carriages, in the first instance, to pass, in line, down another thoroughfare, and so come into the Corso at the end remote from the Piazza del Popolo; which is one of its terminations. Accordingly, we fell into the string of coaches, and, for some time, jogged on quietly enough; now crawling on at a very slow walk; now trotting half-a-dozen yards; now backing fifty; and now stopping altogether: as the pressure in front obliged us. If any impetuous carriage dashed out of the rank and clattered forward, with the wild idea of getting on faster, it was suddenly met, or overtaken, by a trooper on horseback, who, deaf as his own drawn sword to all remonstrances, immediately escorted it back to the very end of the row, and made it a dim speck in the remotest perspective. Occasionally, we interchanged a volley of confetti with the carriage next in front, or the carriage next behind; but, as yet, the capturing of stray and errant coaches by the military was the chief amusement.

Presently we came into a narrow street, where, besides one line of carriages going, there was another line of carriages returning. Here the sugar-plums and the nosegays began to fly about pretty smartly; and I was fortunate enough to observe one gentleman, attired as a Greek warrior, catch a light-whiskered brigand on the nose (he was in the very act of tossing up a bouquet to a young lady in a first-floor window) with a precision that was much applauded by the bystanders. As this victorious Greek was exchanging a facetious remark with a stout gentleman in a doorway—one half black and one half white, as if he had been peeled up the middle—who had offered him his congratulations on this achievement, he received an orange from a housetop full on his left ear, and was much surprised, not to say discomfited. Especially as he was standing up at the time; and, in consequence of the carriage moving on suddenly at the same moment, staggered ignominiously, and buried himself among his flowers.

Some quarter of an hour of this sort of progress brought us to the Corso; and anything so gay, so bright, and lively as the whole scene there, it would be difficult to imagine. From all the innumerable balconies: from the remotest and highest, no less than from the lowest and nearest: hangings of bright red, bright green, bright blue, white and gold, were fluttering in the brilliant sun-light. From windows and from parapets, and tops of houses, streamers of the richest colours, and draperies of the gaudiest and most sparkling hues, were floating out upon the street. The buildings seemed to have been literally turned inside out, and to have all their gaiety towards the highway. Shop-fronts were taken down, and the windows filled with company, like boxes at a shining theatre; doors were carried off their hinges, and long tapestried groves, hung with garlands of flowers and evergreens, displayed within; builders' scaffoldings were gorgeous temples, radiant in silver, gold, and crimson; and in every nook and corner, from the pavement to the chimney-tops, where women's eyes could glisten, there they danced, and laughed, and sparkled, like the light in water. Every sort of bewitching madness of dress was there. Little preposterous scarlet jackets; quaint old stomachers, more wicked than the smartest bodices; Polish pelisses, strained and tight as ripe gooseberries; tiny Greek caps, all awry, and clinging to the dark hair, Heaven knows how; every wild, quaint, bold, shy, pettish, madcap fancy had its illustra-

tion in a dress; and every fancy was as dead forgotten by its owner, in the tumult of merriment, as if the three old aqueducts, that still remain entire, had brought Lethe into Rome, upon their sturdy arches, that morning.

The carriages were now three abreast; in broader places four; often stationary for a long time together; always one close mass of variegated brightness; showing the whole streetful, through the storm of flowers, like flowers of a larger growth themselves. In some the horses were richly caparisoned in magnificent trappings; in others they were decked, from head to tail, with flowing ribbons. Some were driven by coachmen with enormous double faces: one face leering at the horses: the other cocking its extraordinary eyes into the carriage: and both rattling again under the hail of sugar-plums. Other drivers were attired as women, wearing long ringlets and no bonnets, and looking more ridiculous in any real difficulty with the horses (of which, in such a concourse, there were a great many) than tongue can tell, or pen describe. Instead of sitting *in* the carriages, upon the seats, the handsome Roman women, to see and to be seen the better, sit in the heads of the barouches, at this time of general licence, with their feet upon the cushions—and oh, the flowing skirts and dainty waists, the blessed shapes and laughing faces, the free, good-humoured, gallant figures that they make! There were great vans, too, full of handsome girls—thirty or more together, perhaps—and the broadsides that were poured into, and poured out of, these fairy fire-ships, splashed the air with flowers and bonbons for ten minutes at a time. Carriages, delayed long in one place, begin a deliberate engagement with other carriages, or with people at the lower windows; and the spectators at some upper balcony or window, joining in the fray, and attacking both parties, would empty down great bags of confetti, that descended like a cloud, and in an instant made them white as millers. Still, carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end. Men and boys clinging to the wheels of coaches, and holding on behind, and following in their wake, and diving in among the horses' feet to pick up scattered flowers to sell again; maskers on foot (the drollest, generally), in fantastic exaggerations of court dresses, surveying the throng through enormous eye-glasses, and always transported with an ecstasy of love, on the discovery of any particularly old lady at a window; long strings of Policinelli, laying about them with blown bladders at the ends of sticks; a waggonful of madmen, screaming and tearing to the life; a coachful of grave mamelukes, with their horse-tail standard set up in the midst; a party of gipsy women engaged in terrific conflict with a shipful of sailors; a man-monkey on a pole, surrounded by strange animals with pigs' faces, and lions' tails, carried under their arms, or worn gracefully over their shoulders: carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end. Not many actual characters sustained, or represented, perhaps, considering the number dressed, but the main pleasure of the scene consisting in its perfect good temper; in its bright, and infinite, and flashing variety; and in its entire abandonment to the mad humour of the time—an abandonment so perfect, so contagious, so irresistible, that the steadiest foreigner fights up to his middle in flowers and sugar-plums, like the wildest Roman of them all, and thinks of nothing else till half-past four o'clock, when he is suddenly reminded (to his great regret) that this is not the whole business of his existence, by hearing the trumpets sound, and seeing the dragoons begin to clear the street.

How it ever *is* cleared for the race that takes place at five, or how the horses ever go through the race, without going over the people, is more than I can say. But the carriages get out into the by-streets, or up into the Piazza del Popolo, and some people sit in temporary galleries in the latter place, and tens of thousands line the Corso on both sides, when the horses are brought out into the Piazza—to the foot of that same column which, for centuries, looked down upon the games and chariot races in the Circus Maximus.

At a given signal they are started off. Down the live lane, the whole length of the Corso, they fly like the wind: riderless, as all the world knows: with shining ornaments upon their backs, and twisted in their plaited manes: and with heavy little balls, stuck full of spikes, dangling at their sides, to goad them on. The jingling of these trappings, and the rattling of their hoofs upon the hard stones; the dash and fury of their speed along the echoing street; nay, the very cannon that are fired—these noises are nothing to the roaring of the multitude: their shouts: the clapping of their hands. But it is soon over—almost instantaneously. More cannon shake the town. The horses have plunged into the carpets put across the street to stop them; the goal is reached; the prizes are won (they are given, in part, by the poor Jews, as a compromise for not running foot-races

A SKETCH AT THE CARNIVAL.—P. 180

themselves); and there is an end to that day's sport.

But if the scene be bright, and gay, and crowded on the last day but one, it attains, on the concluding day, to such a height of glittering colour, swarming life, and frolicsome uproar, that the bare recollection of it makes me giddy at this moment. The same diversions, greatly heightened and intensified in the ardour with which they are pursued, go on until the same hour. The race is repeated; the cannon are fired; the shouting and clapping of hands are renewed; the cannon are fired again; the race is over; and the prizes are won. But, the carriages: ankle deep in sugar-plums within, and so beflowered and dusty without as to be hardly recognisable for the same vehicles that they were three hours ago: instead of scampering off in all directions, throng into the Corso, where they are soon wedged together in a scarcely moving mass. For the diversion of the Moccoletti, the last gay madness of the Carnival, is now at hand; and sellers of little tapers, like what are called Christmas candles in England, are shouting lustily on every side, "Moccoli, Moccoli! Ecco Moccoli!"—a new item in the tumult; quite abolishing that other item of "Ecco Fiori! Ecco Fior—r—r!" which has been making itself audible over all the rest, at intervals, the whole day through.

As the bright hangings and dresses are all fading into one dull, heavy, uniform colour in the decline of the day, lights begin flashing here and there: in the windows, on the housetops, in the balconies, in the carriages, in the hands of the foot-passengers: little by little: gradually, gradually: more and more: until the whole long street is one great glare and blaze of fire. Then, everybody present has but one engrossing object; that is, to extinguish other people's candles, and to keep his own alight; and everybody: man, woman, or child, gentleman or lady, prince or peasant, native or foreigner: yells and screams, and roars incessantly, as a taunt to the subdued, "Senza Moccolo, Senza Moccolo!" (Without a light! Without a light!) until nothing is heard but a gigantic chorus of those two words, mingled with peals of laughter.

The spectacle, at this time, is one of the most extraordinary that can be imagined. Carriages coming slowly by, with everybody standing on the seats or on the box, holding up their lights at arm's length for greater safety; some in paper shades; some with a bunch of undefended little tapers, kindled altogether; some with blazing torches; some with feeble little candles; men on foot, creeping along, among the wheels, watching their opportunity to make a spring at some particular light, and dash it out; other people climbing up into carriages, to get hold of them by main force; others chasing some unlucky wanderer round and round his own coach, to blow out the light he has begged or stolen somewhere, before he can ascend to his own company, and enable them to light their extinguished tapers; others with their hats off, at a carriage door, humbly beseeching some kind-hearted lady to oblige them with a light for a cigar, and when she is in the fulness of doubt whether to comply or no, blowing out the candle she is guarding so tenderly with her little hand; other people at the windows fishing for candles with lines and hooks, or letting down long willow wands with handkerchiefs at the end, and flapping them out dexterously when the bearer is at the height of his triumph; others biding their time in corners, with immense extinguishers like halberds, and suddenly coming down upon glorious torches; others gathered round one coach, and sticking to it; others raining oranges and nosegays at an obdurate little lantern, or regularly storming a pyramid of men, holding up one man among them, who carries one feeble little wick above his head, with which he defies them all! Senza Moccolo! Senza Moccolo! Beautiful women, standing up in coaches, pointing in derision at extinguished lights, and clapping their hands, as they pass on, crying, "Senza Moccolo! Senza Moccolo!" low balconies full of lovely faces and gay dresses, struggling with assailants in the streets; some repressing them as they climb up, some bending down, some leaning over, some shrinking back—delicate arms and bosoms—graceful figures—glowing lights, fluttering dresses, Senza Moccolo, Senza Moccolo, Senza Moc-co-lo-o-o-o!—when, in the wildest enthusiasm of the cry, and fullest ecstasy of the sport, the Ave Maria rings from the church steeples, and the Carnival is over in an instant—put out like a taper, with a breath!

There was a masquerade at the theatre at night, as dull and senseless as a London one, and only remarkable for the summary way in which the house was cleared at eleven o'clock: which was done by a line of soldiers forming along the wall, at the back of the stage, and sweeping the whole company out before them, like a broad broom. The game of the Moccoletti (the word, in the singular, Moccoletto, is the diminutive of Moccolo, and means a little lamp or candle-snuff) is supposed by some to be a ceremony of burlesque mourning for the death of the Carnival: candles being indispensable to

Catholic grief. But whether it be so, or be a remnant of the ancient Saturnalia, or an incorporation of both, or have its origin in anything else, I shall always remember it, and the frolic, as a brilliant and most captivating sight: no less remarkable for the unbroken good-humour of all concerned, down to the very lowest (and among those who scaled the carriages were many of the commonest men and boys), than for its innocent vivacity. For, odd as it may seem to say so, of a sport so full of thoughtlessness and personal display, it is as free from any taint of immodesty as any general mingling of the two sexes can possibly be; and there seems to prevail, during its progress, a feeling of general, almost childish, simplicity and confidence, which one thinks of with a pang, when the Ave Maria has rung it away for a whole year.

Availing ourselves of a part of the quiet interval between the termination of the Carnival and the beginning of the Holy Week: when everybody had run away from the one, and few people had yet begun to run back again for the other: we went conscientiously to work to see Rome. And, by dint of going out early every morning, and coming back late every evening, and labouring hard all day, I believe we made acquaintance with every post and pillar in the city, and the country round; and, in particular, explored so many churches that I abandoned that part of the enterprise at last, before it was half finished, lest I should never, of my own accord, go to church again as long as I lived. But, I managed, almost every day, at one time or other, to get back to the Coliseum, and out upon the open Campagna, beyond the tomb of Cecilia Metella.

We often encountered, in these expeditions, a company of English Tourists, with whom I had an ardent, but ungratified, longing to establish a speaking acquaintance. They were one Mr. Davis, and a small circle of friends. It was impossible not to know Mrs. Davis's name, from her being always in great request among her party, and her party being everywhere. During the Holy Week, they were in every part of every scene of every ceremony. For a fortnight or three weeks before it, they were in every tomb, and every church, and every ruin, and every Picture Gallery; and I hardly ever observed Mrs. Davis to be silent for a moment. Deep underground, high up in St. Peter's, out on the Campagna, and stifling in the Jews' quarter, Mrs. Davis turned up, all the same. I don't think she ever saw anything, or ever looked at anything; and she had always lost something out of a straw hand-basket, and was trying to find it, with all her might and main, among an immense quantity of English halfpence, which lay, like sands upon the seashore, at the bottom of it. There was a professional Cicerone always attached to the party (which had been brought over from London, fifteen or twenty strong, by contract), and if he so much as looked at Mrs. Davis, she invariably cut him short by saying, "There, God bless the man, don't worrit me! I don't understand a word you say, and shouldn't if you was to talk till you was black in the face!" Mr. Davis always had a snuff-coloured great-coat on, and carried a great green umbrella in his hand, and had a slow curiosity constantly devouring him, which prompted him to do extraordinary things, such as taking the covers off urns in tombs, and looking in at the ashes as if they were pickles—and tracing out inscriptions with the ferrule of his umbrella, and saying, with intense thoughtfulness, "Here' a B you see, and there's a R, and this is the way we goes on in; is it?" His antiquarian habits occasioned his being frequently in the rear of the rest; and one of the agonies of Mrs Davis, and the party in general, was an ever-present fear that Davis would be lost. This caused them to scream for him in the strangest places, and at the most improper seasons. And when he came, slowly emerging out of some Sepulchre or other, like a peaceful Ghoule, saying, "Here I am!" Mrs. Davis invariably replied, "You'll be buried alive in a foreign country, Davis, and it's no use trying to prevent you!"

Mr. and Mrs. Davis, and their party, had, probably, been brought from London in about nine or ten days. Eighteen hundred years ago, the Roman legions under Claudius protested against being led into Mr. and Mrs. Davis's country, urging that it lay beyond the limits of the world.

Among what may be called the Cubs or minor Lions of Rome, there was one that amused me mightily. It is always to be found there; and its den is on the great flight of steps that lead from the Piazza di Spagna to the Church of Trinita del Monte. In plainer words, these steps are the great place of resort for the artists' "Models," and there they are constantly waiting to be hired. The first time I went up there, I could not conceive why the faces seemed familiar to me; why they appeared to have beset me, for years, in every possible variety of action and costume; and how it came to pass that they started up before me, in Rome, in the broad day, like so many saddled and bridled nightmares. I soon found that we had made acquaintance, and improved it, for several years, on the walls

of various Exhibition Galleries. There is one old gentleman, with long white hair and an immense beard, who, to my knowledge, has gone half through the catalogue of the Royal Academy. This is the venerable, or patriarchal model. He carries a long staff; and every knot and twist in that staff I have seen, faithfully delineated, innumerable times. There is another man in a blue cloak, who always pretends to be asleep in the sun (when there is any), and who, I need not say, is always very wide awake, and very attentive to the disposition of his legs. This is the *dolce far niente* model. There is another man in a brown cloak, who leans against a wall, with his arms folded in his mantle, and looks out of the corners of his eyes: which are just visible beneath his broad slouched hat. This is the assassin model. There is another man, who constantly looks over his own shoulder, and is always going away, but never goes. This is the haughty, or scornful model. As to Domestic Happiness, and Holy Families, they should come very cheap, for there are lumps of them, all up the steps; and the cream of the thing is, that they are all the falsest vagabonds in the world, especially made up for the purpose, and having no counterparts in Rome, or any other part of the habitable globe.

My recent mention of the Carnival reminds me of its being said to be a mock mourning (in the ceremony with which it closes) for the gaieties and merry-makings before Lent; and this again reminds me of the real funerals and mourning processions of Rome, which, like those in most other parts of Italy, are rendered chiefly remarkable to a Foreigner by the indifference with which the mere clay is universally regarded, after life has left it. And this is not from the survivors having had time to dissociate the memory of the dead from their well-remembered appearance and form on earth; for the interment follows too speedily after death for that: almost always taking place within four-and-twenty hours, and, sometimes, within twelve.

At Rome there is the same arrangement of Pits in a great, bleak, open, dreary space that I have already described as existing in Genoa. When I visited it, at noonday, I saw a solitary coffin of plain deal: uncovered by any shroud or pall, and so slightly made, that the hoof of any wandering mule would have crushed it in: carelessly tumbled down, all on one side, on the door of one of the pits—and there left, by itself, in the wind and sunshine. "How does it come to be left here?" I asked the man who showed me the place. "It was brought here half an hour ago, Signore," he said. I remembered to have met the procession on its return: straggling away at a good round pace. "When will it be put in the pit?" I asked him. "When the cart comes, and it is opened to-night," he said. "How much does it cost to be brought here in this way, instead of coming in the cart?" I asked him. "Ten scudi," he said (about two pounds two-and-sixpence, English). "The other bodies, for whom nothing is paid, are taken to the Church of the Santa Maria della Consolazione," he continued, "and brought here all together in the cart at night." I stood a moment looking at the coffin, which had two initial letters scrawled upon the top: and turned away, with an expression in my face, I suppose, of not much liking its exposure in that manner: for he said, shrugging his shoulders with great vivacity, and giving a pleasant smile, "But he's dead, Signore, he's dead. Why not?"

Among the innumerable churches, there is one I must select for separate mention. It is the Church of the Ara Cœli, supposed to be built on the site of the old Temple of Jupiter Feretrius; and approached, on one side, by a long steep flight of steps, which seem incomplete without some group of bearded soothsayers on the top. It is remarkable for the possession of a miraculous Bambino, or wooden doll, representing the Infant Saviour; and I first saw this miraculous Bambino, in legal phrase, in manner following, that is to say:

We had strolled into the church one afternoon, and were looking down its long vista of gloomy pillars (for all these ancient churches built upon the ruins of old temples are dark and sad), when the Brave came running in, with a grin upon his face that stretched it from ear to ear, and implored us to follow him without a moment's delay, as they were going to show the Bambino to a select party. We accordingly hurried off to a sort of chapel, or sacristy, hard by the chief altar, but not in the church itself, where the select party, consisting of two or three Catholic gentlemen and ladies (not Italians), were already assembled: and where one hollow-cheeked young monk was lighting up divers candles, while another was putting on some clerical robes over his coarse brown habit. The candles were on a kind of altar, and above it were two delectable figures, such as you would see at any English fair, representing the Holy Virgin, and St. Joseph, as I suppose, bending in devotion over a wooden box, or coffer; which was shut.

The hollow-cheeked monk, Number One,

having finished lighting the candles, went down on his knees, in a corner, before this set-piece; and the monk Number Two, having put on a pair of highly ornamented and gold-bespattered gloves, lifted down the coffer with great reverence, and set it on the altar. Then, with many genuflexions, and muttering certain prayers, he opened it, and let down the front, and took off sundry coverings of satin and lace from the inside. The ladies had been on their knees from the commencement; and the gentlemen now dropped down devoutly, as he exposed to

ARTISTS' MODELS.

view a little wooden doll, in face very like General Tom Thumb, the American Dwarf: gorgeously dressed in satin and gold lace, and actually blazing with rich jewels. There was scarcely a spot upon its little breast, or neck, or stomach, but was sparkling with the costly offerings of the Faithful. Presently he lifted it out of the box, and carrying it round among the kneelers, set its face against the forehead of every one, and tendered its clumsy foot to them to kiss—a ceremony which they all performed, down to a dirty little ragamuffin of a boy who had walked in from the street. When this was done he laid it in the box again; and the com-

pany, rising, drew near, and commended the jewels in whispers. In good time he replaced the coverings, shut up the box, put it back in its place, locked up the whole concern (Holy Family and all) behind a pair of folding doors; took off his priestly vestments; and received the customary "small charge," while his companion, by means of an extinguisher fastened to the end of a long stick, put out the lights, one after another. The candles being all extinguished, and the money all collected, they retired, and so did the spectators.

I met this same Bambino in the street, a short time afterwards, going, in great state, to the house of some sick person. It is taken to all parts of Rome for this purpose constantly; but, I understand that it is not always as successful as could be wished; for, making its appearance at the bedside of weak and nervous people in extremity, accompanied by a numerous escort, it not unfrequently frightens them to death. It is most popular in cases of childbirth, where it has done such wonders, that if a lady be longer than usual in getting through her difficulties, a messenger is dispatched, with all speed, to solicit the immediate attendance of the Bambino. It is a very valuable property, and much confided in—especially by the religious body to whom it belongs.

I am happy to know that it is not considered immaculate by some who are good Catholics, and who are behind the scenes, from what was told me by the near relation of a Priest, himself a Catholic, and a gentleman of learning and intelligence. This Priest made my informant promise that he would on no account allow the Bambino to be borne into the bedroom of a sick lady, in whom they were both interested. "For," said he, "if they (the monks) trouble her with it, and intrude themselves into her room, it will certainly kill her." My informant accordingly looked out of the window when it came; and, with many thanks, declined to open the door. He endeavoured, in another case of which he had no other knowledge than such as he gained as a passer-by at the moment, to prevent its being carried into a small, unwholesome chamber, where a poor girl was dying. But, he strove against it unsuccessfully, and she expired while the crowd were pressing round her bed.

Among the people who drop into St. Peter's at their leisure, to kneel on the pavement, and say a quiet prayer, there are certain schools and seminaries, priestly and otherwise, that come in, twenty or thirty strong. These boys always kneel down in single file, one behind the other, with a tall, grim master, in a black gown, bringing up the rear: like a pack of cards arranged to be tumbled down at a touch, with a disproportionately large Knave of clubs at the end. When they have had a minute or so at the chief altar, they scramble up, and, filing off to the chapel of the Madonna, or the sacrament, flop down again in the same order; so that, if anybody *did* stumble against the master, a general and sudden overthrow of the whole line must inevitably ensue.

The scene in all the churches is the strangest possible. The same monotonous, heartless, drowsy chanting always going on; the same dark building, darker from the brightness of the street without; the same lamps dimly burning; the selfsame people kneeling here and there; turned towards you, from one altar or other, the same priest's back, with the same large cross embroidered on it: however different in size, in shape, in wealth, in architecture, this church is from that, it is the same thing still. There are the same dirty beggars stopping in their muttered prayers to beg; the same miserable cripples exhibiting their deformity at the doors; the same blind men rattling little pots like kitchen pepper-casters: their depositories for alms; the same preposterous crowns of silver stuck upon the painted heads of single saints and Virgins in crowded pictures, so that a little figure on a mountain has a head-dress bigger than the temple in the foreground, or adjacent miles of landscape; the same favourite shrine or figure, smothered with little silver hearts and crosses, and the like: the staple trade and show of all the jewellers; the same odd mixture of respect and indecorum, faith and phlegm: kneeling on the stones, and spitting on them, loudly; getting up from prayers to beg a little, or to pursue some other worldly matter: and then kneeling down again, to resume the contrite supplication at the point where it was interrupted. In one church, a kneeling lady got up from her prayers, for a moment, to offer us her card as a teacher of Music; and in another, a sedate gentleman, with a very thick walking-staff, arose from his devotions to belabour his dog, who was growling at another dog: and whose yelps and howls resounded through the church, as his master quietly relapsed into his former train of meditation—keeping his eye upon the dog at the same time, nevertheless.

Above all, there is always a receptacle for the contributions of the Faithful, in some form or other. Sometimes it is a money-box, set up between the worshipper and the wooden life-size figure of the Redeemer; sometimes it is a little chest for the maintenance of the Virgin;

sometimes an appeal on behalf of a popular Bambino: sometimes a bag at the end of a long stick, thrust among the people here and there, and vigilantly jingled by an active Sacristan; but there it always is, and, very often, in many shapes in the same church, and doing pretty well in all. Nor is it wanting in the open air—the streets and roads—for often as you are walking along, thinking about anything rather than a tin canister, that object pounces out upon you from a little house by the wayside; and on its top is painted, "For the Souls in Purgatory;" an appeal which the bearer repeats a great many times, as he rattles it before you, much as Punch rattles the cracked bell which his sanguine disposition makes an organ of.

And this reminds me that some Roman altars of peculiar sanctity bear the inscription, "Every mass performed at this altar frees a soul from Purgatory." I have never been able to find out the charge for one of these services, but they should needs be expensive. There are several Crosses in Rome, too, the kissing of which confers indulgences for varying terms. That in the centre of the Coliseum is worth a hundred days; and people may be seen kissing it from morning to night. It is curious that some of these crosses seem to acquire an arbitrary popularity; this very one among them. In another part of the Coliseum there is a cross upon a marble slab, with the inscription, "Who kisses this cross shall be entitled to Two hundred and forty days' indulgence." But I saw no one person kiss it, though, day after day, I sat in the arena, and saw scores upon scores of peasants pass it, on their way to kiss the other.

To single out details from the great dream of Roman Churches would be the wildest occupation in the world. But San Stefano Rotondo, a damp, mildewed vault of an old church in the outskirts of Rome, will always struggle uppermost in my mind, by reason of the hideous paintings with which its walls are covered. These represent the martyrdoms of saints and early Christians; and such a panorama of horror and butchery no man could imagine in his sleep, though he were to eat a whole pig, raw, for supper. Grey-bearded men being boiled, fried, grilled, crimped, singed, eaten by wild beasts, worried by dogs, buried alive, torn asunder by horses, chopped up small with hatchets: women having their breasts torn with iron pincers, their tongues cut out, their ears screwed off, their jaws broken, their bodies stretched upon the rack, or skinned upon the stake, or crackled up and melted in the fire: these are among the mildest subjects. So insisted on, and laboured at, besides, that every sufferer gives you the same occasion for wonder as poor old Duncan awoke in Lady Macbeth, when she marvelled at his having so much blood in him.

There is an upper chamber in the Mamertine prisons, over what is said to have been—and very possibly may have been—the dungeon of St. Peter. This chamber is now fitted up as an oratory, dedicated to that saint; and it lives, as a distinct and separate place, in my recollection, too. It is very small and low-roofed; and the dread and gloom of the ponderous, obdurate old prison are on it, as if they had come up in a dark mist through the floor. Hanging on the walls, among the clustered votive offerings, are objects, at once strangely in keeping, and strangely at variance, with the place—rusty daggers, knives, pistols, clubs, divers instruments of violence and murder, brought here, fresh from use, and hung up to propitiate offended Heaven: as if the blood upon them would drain off in consecrated air, and have no voice to cry with. It is all so silent and so close, and tomb-like; and the dungeons below are so black and stealthy, and stagnant, and naked; that this little dark spot becomes a dream within a dream: and in the vision of great churches which come rolling past me like a sea, it is a small wave by itself, that melts into no other wave, and does not flow on with the rest.

It is an awful thing to think of the enormous caverns that are entered from some Roman churches, and undermine the city. Many churches have crypts and subterranean chapels of great size, which, in the ancient time, were baths, and secret chambers of temples, and what not; but I do not speak of them. Beneath the Church of San Giovanni and San Paolo there are the jaws of a terrific range of caverns, hewn out of the rock, and said to have another outlet underneath the Coliseum—tremendous darknesses of vast extent, half-buried in the earth and unexplorable, where the dull torches, flashed by the attendants, glimmer down long ranges of distant vaults branching to the right and left, like streets in the city of the dead; and show the cold damp stealing down the walls, drip-drop, drip-drop, to join the pools of water that lie here and there, and never saw, and never will see, one ray of the sun. Some accounts make these the prisons of the wild beasts destined for the amphitheatre; some the prisons of the condemned gladiators; some, both. But the legend most appalling to the fancy is, that in the upper range (for there are two stories of these caves) the Early Christians destined to be eaten at the Coliseum Shows

heard the wild beasts, hungry for them, roaring down below; until, upon the night and solitude of their captivity, there burst the sudden noon and life of the vast theatre crowded to the parapet, and of these, their dreaded neighbours, bounding in!

Below the Church of San Sebastiano, two miles beyond the gate of San Sebastiano, on the Appian Way, is the entrance to the catacombs of Rome—quarries in the old time, but afterwards the hiding-places of the Christians. These ghastly passages have been explored for twenty miles; and form a chain of labyrinths, sixty miles in circumference.

A gaunt Franciscan friar, with a wild, bright eye, was our only guide down into this profound and dreadful place. The narrow ways and openings hither and thither, coupled with the dead and heavy air, soon blotted out, in all of us, any recollection of the track by which we had come; and I could not help thinking, "Good Heaven, if, in a sudden fit of madness, he should dash the torches out, or if he should be seized with a fit, what would become of us?" On we wandered, among martyrs' graves: passing great subterranean vaulted roads, diverging in all directions, and choked up with heaps of stones, that thieves and murderers may not take refuge there, and form a population under Rome, even worse than that which lives between it and the sun. Graves, graves, graves; Graves of men, of women, of their little children, who ran crying to the persecutors, "We are Christians! We are Christians!" that they might be murdered with their parents; Graves with the palm of martyrdom roughly cut into their stone boundaries, and little niches, made to hold a vessel of the martyrs' blood; Graves of some who lived down here for years together, ministering to the rest, and preaching truth, and hope, and comfort from the rude altars, that bear witness to their fortitude at this hour; more roomy graves, but far more terrible, where hundreds, being surprised, were hemmed in and walled up: buried before Death, and killed by slow starvation.

"The Triumphs of the Faith are not above-ground in our splendid churches," said the friar, looking round upon us, as we stopped to rest in one of the low passages, with bones and dust surrounding us on every side. "They are here! Among the Martyrs' Graves!" He was a gentle, earnest man, and said it from his heart; but when I thought how Christian men have dealt with one another; how, perverting our most merciful religion, they have hunted down and tortured, burnt and beheaded, strangled, slaughtered, and oppressed each other; I pictured to myself an agony surpassing any that this Dust had suffered with the breath of life yet lingering in it, and how these great and constant hearts would have been shaken—how they would have quailed and drooped—if a foreknowledge of the deeds that professing Christians would commit in the Great Name for which they died, could have rent them, with its own unutterable anguish, on the cruel wheel, and bitter cross, and in the fearful fire.

Such are the spots and patches in my dream of churches that remain apart, and keep their separate identity. I have a fainter recollection, sometimes, of the relics; of the fragments of the pillar of the Temple that was rent in twain; of the portion of the table that was spread for the Last Supper; of the well at which the woman of Samaria gave water to Our Saviour; of two columns from the house of Pontius Pilate; of the stone to which the sacred hands were bound, when the scourging was performed; of the gridiron of St. Lawrence, and the stone below it, marked with the frying of his fat and blood; these set a shadowy mark on some cathedrals, as an old story or a fable might, and stop them for an instant, as they flit before me. The rest is a vast wilderness of consecrated buildings of all shapes and fancies, blending one with another; of battered pillars of old Pagan temples, dug up from the ground, and forced, like giant captives, to support the roofs of Christian churches; of pictures, bad, and wonderful, and impious, and ridiculous; of kneeling people, curling incense, tinkling bells, and sometimes (but not often) of a swelling organ; of Madonne, with their breasts stuck full of swords, arranged in a half-circle like a modern fan; of actual skeletons of dead saints, hideously attired in gaudy satins, silks, and velvets trimmed with gold: their withered crust of skull adorned with precious jewels, or with chaplets of crushed flowers; sometimes, of people gathered round the pulpit, and a monk within it stretching out the crucifix, and preaching fiercely: the sun just streaming down through some high window on the sail-cloth stretched above him and across the church, to keep his high-pitched voice from being lost among the echoes of the roof. Then my tired memory comes out upon a flight of steps, where knots of people are asleep, or basking in the light; and strolls away, among the rags, and smells, and palaces, and hovels of an old Italian street.

On one Saturday morning (the eighth of

March) a man was beheaded here. Nine or ten months before, he had waylaid a Bavarian countess, travelling as a pilgrim to Rome—alone and on foot, of course—and performing, it is said, that act of piety for the fourth time. He saw her change a piece of gold at Viterbo, where he lived; followed her; bore her company on her journey for some forty miles or more, on the treacherous pretext of protecting her; attacked her, in the fulfilment of his unrelenting purpose, on the Campagna, within a very short distance of Rome, near to what is called (but what is not) the Tomb of Nero; robbed her; and beat her to death with her own pilgrim's staff. He was newly married, and gave some of her apparel to his wife: saying that he had bought it at a fair. She, however, who had seen the pilgrim-countess passing through their town, recognised some trifle as having belonged to her. Her husband then told her what he had done. She, in confession, told a priest; and the man was taken within four days after the commission of the murder.

There are no fixed times for the administration of justice, or its execution, in this unaccountable country; and he had been in prison ever since. On the Friday, as he was dining with the other prisoners, they came and told him he was to be beheaded next morning, and took him away. It is very unusual to execute in Lent; but his crime being a very bad one, it was deemed advisable to make an example of him at that time, when great numbers of pilgrims were coming towards Rome, from all parts, for the Holy Week. I heard of this on the Friday evening, and saw the bills up at the churches, calling on the people to pray for the criminal's soul. So I determined to go and see him executed.

The beheading was appointed for fourteen and a half o'clock, Roman time: or a quarter before nine in the forenoon. I had two friends with me; and, as we did not know but that the crowd might be very great, we were on the spot by half-past seven. The place of execution was near the Church of San Giovanni Decollato (a doubtful compliment to St. John the Baptist), in one of the impassable back-streets without any footway, of which a great part of Rome is composed—a street of rotten houses, which do not seem to belong to anybody, and do not seem to have ever been inhabited, and certainly were never built on any plan, or for any particular purpose, and have no window-sashes, and are a little like deserted breweries, and might be warehouses, but for having nothing in them. Opposite to one of these, a white house, the scaffold was built. An untidy, unpainted, uncouth, crazy-looking thing, of course: some seven feet high, perhaps: with a tall, gallows-shaped frame rising above it, in which was the knife, charged with a ponderous mass of iron, all ready to descend, and glittering brightly in the morning sun, whenever it looked out, now and then, from behind a cloud.

There were not many people lingering about; and these were kept at a considerable distance from the scaffold by parties of the Pope's dragoons. Two or three hundred foot-soldiers were under arms, standing at ease in clusters here and there; and the officers were walking up and down in twos and threes, chatting together, and smoking cigars.

At the end of the street was an open space, where there would be a dust-heap, and piles of broken crockery, and mounds of vegetable refuse, but for such things being thrown anywhere and everywhere in Rome, and favouring no particular sort of locality. We got into a kind of wash-house, belonging to a dwelling-house on this spot; and standing there in an old cart, and on a heap of cart wheels piled against the wall, looked, through a large grated window, at the scaffold, and straight down the street beyond it, until, in consequence of its turning off abruptly to the left, our perspective was brought to a sudden termination, and had a corpulent officer, in a cocked-hat, for its crowning feature.

Nine o'clock struck, and ten o'clock struck, and nothing happened. All the bells of all the churches rang as usual. A little parliament of dogs assembled in the open space, and chased each other in and out among the soldiers. Fierce-looking Romans of the lowest class, in blue cloaks, russet cloaks, and rags uncloaked, came and went, and talked together. Women and children fluttered on the skirts of the scanty crowd. One large muddy spot was left quite bare, like a bald place on a man's head. A cigar merchant, with an earthen pot of charcoal ashes in one hand, went up and down crying his wares. A pastry merchant divided his attention between the scaffold and his customers. Boys tried to climb up walls, and tumbled down again. Priests and monks elbowed a passage for themselves among the people, and stood on tiptoe for a sight of the knife: then went away. Artists, in inconceivable hats of the middle ages, and beards (thank Heaven) of no age at all, flashed picturesque scowls about them from their stations in the throng. One gentleman (connected with the fine arts I presume) went up and down in a pair of Hessian boots, with a red beard hanging down on his breast, and his long

and bright red hair plaited into two tails, one on either side of his head: which fell over his shoulders in front of him, very nearly to his waist, and were carefully entwined and braided!

Eleven o'clock struck; and still nothing happened. A rumour got about, among the crowd, that the criminal would not confess; in which case the priests would keep him until the Ave Maria (sunset); for it is their merciful custom never finally to turn the crucifix away from a man at that pass, as one refusing to be shriven, and consequently a sinner abandoned of the Saviour, until then. People began to drop off. The officers shrugged their shoulders and looked doubtful. The dragoons, who came riding up below our window, every now and then, to order an unlucky hackney coach or cart away as soon as it had comfortably established itself, and was covered with exulting people (but never before), became imperious and quick-tempered. The bald place hadn't a straggling hair upon it; and the corpulent officer, crowning the perspective, took a world of snuff.

Suddenly, there was a noise of trumpets. "Attention!" was among the foot-soldiers instantly. They were marched up to the scaffold, and formed round it. The dragoons galloped to their nearer stations too. The guillotine became the centre of a wood of bristling bayonets and shining sabres. The people closed round nearer, on the flank of the soldiery. A long, straggling stream of men and boys, who had accompanied the procession from the prison, came pouring into the open space. The bald spot was scarcely distinguishable from the rest. The cigar and pastry merchants resigned all thoughts of business for the moment, and, abandoning themselves wholly to pleasure, got good situations in the crowd. The perspective ended, now, in a troop of dragoons. And the corpulent officer, sword in hand, looked hard at a church close to him, which he could see, but we, the crowd, could not.

After a short delay, some monks were seen approaching to the scaffold from this church; and above their heads, coming on slowly and gloomily, the effigy of Christ upon the cross, canopied with black. This was carried round the foot of the scaffold, to the front, and turned towards the criminal, that he might see it to the last. It was hardly in its place, when he appeared on the platform, barefooted; his hands bound; and with the collar and neck of his shirt cut away almost to the shoulder. A young man—six-and-twenty—vigorously made, and well shaped. Face pale; small, dark moustache; and dark brown hair.

He had refused to confess, it seemed, without first having his wife brought to see him; and they had sent an escort for her, which had occasioned the delay.

He immediately kneeled down, below the knife. His neck fitting into a hole, made for the purpose, in a cross-plank, was shut down by another plank above; exactly like the pillory. Immediately below him was a leathern bag. And into it his head rolled instantly.

The executioner was holding it by the hair, and walking with it round the scaffold, showing it to the people, before one quite knew that the knife had fallen heavily, and with a rattling sound.

When it had travelled round the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front—a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and the flies to settle on. The eyes were turned upward, as if he had avoided the sight of the leathern bag, and looked to the crucifix. Every tinge and hue of life had left it in that instant. It was dull, cold, livid wax. The body also.

There was a great deal of blood. When we left the window, and went close up to the scaffold, it was very dirty; one of the two men who were throwing water over it, turning to help the other lift the body into a shell, picked his way as through mire. A strange appearance was the apparent annihilation of the neck. The head was taken off so close, that it seemed as if the knife had narrowly escaped crushing the jaw, or shaving off the ear; and the body looked as if there were nothing left above the shoulder.

Nobody cared, or was at all affected. There was no manifestation of disgust, or pity, or indignation, or sorrow. My empty pockets were tried, several times, in the crowd immediately below the scaffold, as the corpse was being put into its coffin. It was an ugly, filthy, careless, sickening spectacle; meaning nothing but butchery, beyond the momentary interest, to the one wretched actor. Yes! Such a sight has one meaning and one warning. Let me not forget it. The speculators in the lottery station themselves at favourable points for counting the gouts of blood that spurt out here or there; and buy that number. It is pretty sure to have a run upon it.

The body was carted away in due time, the knife cleansed, the scaffold taken down, and all the hideous apparatus removed. The executioner: an outlaw *ex officio* (what a satire on the Punishment!) who dare not, for his life, cross the Bridge of St. Angelo but to do his work: retreated to his lair, and the show was over.

At the head of the collections in the palaces of Rome, the Vatican, of course, with its treasures of art, its enormous galleries, and staircases, and suites upon suites of immense chambers, ranks highest and stands foremost. Many most noble statues and wonderful pictures are there; nor is it heresy to say that there is a considerable amount of rubbish there too. When any old piece of sculpture dug out of the ground finds a place in a gallery because it *is* old, and without any reference to its intrinsic merits: and finds admirers by the hundred, because it is there, and for no other reason on earth: there will be no lack of objects, very indifferent in the plain eyesight of any one who employs so vulgar a property, when he may wear the spectacles of Cant for less than nothing, and establish himself as a man of taste for the mere trouble of putting them on.

I unreservedly confess, for myself, that I cannot leave my natural perception of what is natural and true at a palace door, in Italy or elsewhere, as I should leave my shoes if I were travelling in the East. I cannot forget that there are certain expressions of face natural to certain passions, and as unchangeable in their nature as the gait of a lion, or the flight of an eagle. I cannot dismiss from my certain knowledge such commonplace facts as the ordinary proportions of men's arms, and legs, and heads; and when I meet with performances that do violence to these experiences and recollections, no matter where they may be, I cannot honestly admire them, and think it best to say so; in spite of high critical advice that we should sometimes feign an admiration, though we have it not.

Therefore, I freely acknowledge that when I see a Jolly young Waterman representing a cherubim, or a Barclay and Perkins's Drayman depicted as an Evangelist, I see nothing to commend or admire in the performance, however great its reputed Painter. Neither am I partial to libellous Angels, who play on fiddles and bassoons, for the edification of sprawling monks apparently in liquor. Nor to those Monsieur Tonsons of galleries, St. Francis and St. Sebastian; both of whom, I submit, should have very uncommon and rare merits, as works of art, to justify their compound multiplication by Italian Painters.

It seems to me, too, that the indiscriminate and determined rapture in which some critics indulge is incompatible with the true appreciation of the really great and transcendent works. I cannot imagine, for example, how the resolute champion of undeserving pictures can soar to the amazing beauty of Titian's great picture of the Assumption of the Virgin at Venice; or how the man who is truly affected by the sublimity of that exquisite production, or who is truly sensible of the beauty of Tintoretto's great picture of the Assembly of the Blessed in the same place, can discern in Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, in the Sistine Chapel, any general idea, or one pervading thought, in harmony with the stupendous subject. He who will contemplate Raphael's masterpiece, the Transfiguration, and will go away into another chamber of that same Vatican, and contemplate another design of Raphael, representing (in incredible caricature) the miraculous stopping of a great fire by Leo the Fourth—and who will say that he admires them both, as works of extraordinary genius—must, as I think, be wanting in his powers of perception in one of the two instances, and, probably, in the high and lofty one.

It is easy to suggest a doubt, but I have a great doubt whether, sometimes, the rules of art are not too strictly observed, and whether it is quite well or agreeable that we should know beforehand where this figure will be turning round, and where that figure will be lying down, and where there will be drapery in folds, and so forth. When I observe heads inferior to the subject in pictures of merit, in Italian galleries, I do not attach that reproach to the Painter, for I have a suspicion that these great men, who were, of necessity, very much in the hands of monks and priests, painted monks and priests a great deal too often. I frequently see, in pictures of real power, heads quite below the story and the painter: and I invariably observe that those heads are of the Convent stamp, and have their counterparts among the Convent inmates of this hour; so, I have settled with myself that, in such cases, the lameness was not with the painter, but with the vanity and ignorance of certain of his employers, who would be apostles—on canvas, at all events.

The exquisite grace and beauty of Canova's statues; the wonderful gravity and repose of many of the ancient works in sculpture, both in the Capitol and the Vatican; and the strength and fire of many others; are, in their different ways, beyond all reach of words. They are especially impressive and delightful, after the works of Bernini and his disciples, in which the churches of Rome, from St. Peter's downward, abound; and which are, I verily believe, the most detestable class of productions in the wide world. I would infinitely rather (as mere works of art) look upon the three deities of the Past, the Present, and the Future, in the Chinese

Collection, than upon the best of these breezy maniacs; whose every fold of drapery is blown inside out; whose smallest vein, or artery, is as big as an ordinary forefinger; whose hair is like a nest of lively snakes; and whose attitudes put all other extravagance to shame. Insomuch that I do honestly believe there can be no place in the world where such intolerable abortions, begotten of the sculptor's chisel, are to be found in such profusion as in Rome.

There is a fine collection of Egyptian antiquities in the Vatican; and the ceilings of the rooms in which they are arranged are painted to represent a starlight sky in the Desert. It may seem an odd idea, but it is very effective. The grim, half-human monsters from the temples look more grim and monstrous underneath the deep dark blue; it sheds a strange uncertain gloomy air on everything—a mystery adapted to the objects; and you leave them, as you find them, shrouded in a solemn night.

In the private palaces pictures are seen to the best advantage. There are seldom so many in one place that the attention need become distracted, or the eye confused. You see them very leisurely; and are rarely interrupted by a crowd of people. There are portraits innumerable, by Titian, and Rembrandt, and Vandyke; heads by Guido, and Domenichino, and Carlo Dolci; various subjects by Correggio, and Murillo, and Raphael, and Salvator Rosa, and Spagnoletto—many of which it would be difficult indeed to praise too highly, or to praise enough; such is their tenderness and grace; their noble elevation, purity, and beauty.

The portrait of Beatrice di Cenci, in the Palazzo Berberini, is a picture almost impossible to be forgotten. Through the transcendent sweetness and beauty of the face, there is a something shining out that haunts me. I see it now, as I see this paper, or my pen. The head is loosely draped in white; the light hair falling down below the linen folds. She has turned suddenly towards you; and there is an expression in the eyes—although they are very tender and gentle—as if the wildness of a momentary terror, or distraction, had been struggled with, and overcome, that instant; and nothing but a celestial hope, and a beautiful sorrow, and a desolate earthly helplessness remained. Some stories say that Guido painted it the night before her execution; some other stories, that he painted it from memory, after having seen her on her way to the scaffold. I am willing to believe that, as you see her on his canvas, so she turned towards him, in the crowd, from the first sight of the axe, and stamped upon his mind a look which he has stamped on mine, as though I had stood beside him in the concourse. The guilty palace of the Cenci: blighting a whole quarter of the town, as it stands withering away by grains: had that face, to my fancy, in its dismal porch, and at its black blind windows, and flitting up and down its dreary stairs, and growing out of the darkness of its ghostly galleries. The History is written in the Painting; written, in the dying girl's face, by Nature's own hand. And oh! how in that one touch she puts to flight (instead of making kin) the puny world that claim to be related to her, in right of poor conventional forgeries!

I saw, in the Palazzo Spada, the statue of Pompey; the statue at whose base Cæsar fell. A stern, tremendous figure! I imagined one of greater finish: of the last refinement: full of delicate touches: losing its distinctness in the giddy eyes of one whose blood was ebbing before it, and settling into some such rigid majesty as this, as Death came creeping over the upturned face.

The excursions in the neighbourhood of Rome are charming, and would be full of interest, were it only for the changing views they afford of the wild Campagna. But, every inch of ground, in every direction, is rich in associations, and in natural beauties. There is Albano, with its lovely lake and wooded shore, and with its wine, that certainly has not improved since the days of Horace, and in these times hardly justifies his panegyric. There is squalid Tivoli, with the river Anio diverted from its course, and plunging down, headlong, some eighty feet in search of it. With its picturesque Temple of the Sibyl, perched high on a crag; its minor water-falls glancing and sparkling in the sun; and one good cavern yawning darkly, where the river takes a fearful plunge and shoots on, low down under beetling rocks. There, too, is the Villa d'Este, deserted and decaying among groves of melancholy pine and cypress trees, where it seems to lie in state. Then, there is Frascati, and, on the steep above it, the ruins of Tusculum, where Cicero lived, and wrote, and adorned his favourite house (some fragments of it may yet be seen there), and where Cato was born. We saw its ruined amphitheatre on a grey, dull day, when a shrill March wind was blowing, and when the scattered stones of the old city lay strewn about the lonely eminence, as desolate and dead as the ashes of a long-extinguished fire.

One day we walked out, a little party of three, to Albano, fourteen miles distant; possessed by

a great desire to go there by the ancient Appian Way, long since ruined and overgrown. We started at half-past seven in the morning, and, within an hour or so, were out upon the open Campagna. For twelve miles we went climbing on, over an unbroken succession of mounds, and heaps, and hills of ruin. Tombs and temples, overthrown and prostrate; small fragments of columns, friezes, pediments; great blocks of granite and marble; mouldering arches, grass-grown and decayed; ruin enough to build a spacious city from; lay strewn about us. Sometimes loose walls, built up from these fragments by the shepherds, came across our path; sometimes a ditch, between two mounds of broken stones, obstructed our progress; sometimes the fragments themselves, rolling from beneath our feet, made it a toilsome matter to advance; but it was always ruin. Now we tracked a piece of the old road above the ground: now traced it underneath a grassy covering, as if that were its grave: but all the way was ruin. In the distance, ruined aqueducts went stalking on their giant course along the plain; and every breath of wind that swept towards us stirred early flowers and grasses, springing up spontaneously, on miles of ruin. The unseen larks above us, who alone disturbed the awful silence, had their nests in ruin; and the fierce herdsmen, clad in sheep-skins, who now and then scowled out upon us from their sleeping nooks, were housed in ruin. The aspect of the desolate Campagna in one direction, where it was most level, reminded me of an American prairie; but what is the solitude of a region where men have never dwelt, to that of a Desert, where a mighty race have left their footprints in the earth from which they have vanished; where the resting-places of their Dead have fallen like their Dead; and the broken hour-glass of Time is but a heap of idle dust? Returning by the road, at sunset, and looking, from the distance, on the course we had taken in the morning, I almost felt (as I had felt when I first saw it at that hour) as if the sun would never rise again, but looked its last, that night, upon a ruined world.

To come again on Rome by moonlight, after such an expedition, is a fitting close to such a day. The narrow streets, devoid of footways, and choked, in every obscure corner, by heaps of dunghill rubbish, contrast so strongly, in their cramped dimensions, and their filth and darkness, with the broad square before some haughty church: in the centre of which a hieroglyphic-covered obelisk, brought from Egypt in the days of the Emperors, looks strangely on the foreign scene about it; or perhaps an ancient pillar, with its honoured statue overthrown, supports a Christian saint: Marcus Aurelius giving place to Paul, and Trajan to St. Peter. Then, there are the ponderous buildings reared from the spoliation of the Coliseum, shutting out the moon, like mountains: while, here and there, are broken arches and rent walls, through which it gushes freely, as the life comes pouring from a wound. The little town of miserable houses, walled, and shut in by barred gates, is the quarter where the Jews are locked up nightly, when the clock strikes eight—a miserable place, densely populated, and reeking with bad odours, but where the people are industrious and money-getting. In the daytime, as you make your way along the narrow streets, you see them all at work: upon the pavement, oftener than in their dark and frouzy shops: furbishing old clothes, and driving bargains.

Crossing from these patches of thick darkness, out into the moon once more, the fountain of Trevi, welling from a hundred jets, and rolling over mimic rocks, is silvery to the eye and ear. In the narrow little throat of street beyond, a booth, dressed out with flaring lamps and boughs of trees, attracts a group of sulky Romans round its smoking coppers of hot broth and cauliflower stew; its trays of fried fish, and its flasks of wine. As you rattle round the sharply-twisting corner, a lumbering sound is heard. The coachman stops abruptly, and uncovers, as a van comes slowly by, preceded by a man who bears a large cross; by a torch-bearer; and a priest: the latter chanting as he goes. It is the Dead Cart, with the bodies of the poor, on their way to burial in the Sacred Field outside the walls, where they will be thrown into the pit that will be covered with a stone to-night, and sealed up for a year.

But whether, in this ride, you pass by obelisks or columns: ancient temples, theatres, houses, porticos, or forums: it is strange to see how every fragment, whenever it is possible, has been blended into some modern structure, and made to serve some modern purpose—a wall, a dwelling-place, a granary, a stable—some use for which it never was designed, and associated with which it cannot otherwise than lamely assort. It is stranger still to see how many ruins of the old mythology: how many fragments of obsolete legend and observance: have been incorporated into the worship of Christian altars here; and how, in numberless respects, the false faith and the true are fused into a monstrous union.

From one part of the city, looking out beyond

the walls, a squat and stunted pyramid (the burial-place of Caius Cestius) makes an opaque triangle in the moonlight. But, to an English traveller, it serves to mark the grave of Shelley too, whose ashes lie beneath a little garden near it. Nearer still, almost within its shadow, lie the bones of Keats, "whose name is writ in water," that shines brightly in the landscape of a calm Italian night.

The Holy Week in Rome is supposed to offer great attractions to all visitors; but, saving for the sights of Easter Sunday, I would counsel those who go to Rome for its own interest to avoid it at that time. The ceremonies, in general, are of the most tedious and wearisome kind; the heat and crowd at every one of them painfully oppressive; the noise, hubbub, and confusion quite distracting. We abandoned the pursuit of these shows very early in the proceedings, and betook ourselves to the Ruins again. But, we plunged into the crowd for a share of the best of the sights: and what we saw I will describe to you.

At the Sistine Chapel, on the Wednesday, we saw very little, for, by the time we reached it (though we were early), the besieging crowd had filled it to the door, and overflowed into the adjoining hall, where they were struggling, and squeezing, and mutually expostulating, and making great rushes every time a lady was brought out faint, as if at least fifty people could be accommodated in her vacant standing-room. Hanging in the doorway of the chapel was a heavy curtain, and this curtain, some twenty people nearest to it, in their anxiety to hear the chanting of the Miserere, were continually plucking at, in opposition to each other, that it might not fall down and stifle the sound of the voices. The consequence was, that it occasioned the most extraordinary confusion, and seemed to wind itself about the unwary like a Serpent. Now, a lady was wrapped up in it, and couldn't be unwound. Now, the voice of a stifling gentleman was heard inside it, beseeching to be let out. Now, two muffled arms, no man could say of which sex, struggled in it as in a sack. Now, it was carried by a rush, bodily overhead into the chapel, like an awning. Now, it came out the other way, and blinded one of the Pope's Swiss Guard, who had arrived, that moment, to set things to rights.

Being seated at a little distance, among two or three of the Pope's gentlemen, who were very weary and counting the minutes—as perhaps his Holiness was too—we had better opportunities of observing this eccentric entertainment than of hearing the Miserere. Sometimes there was a swell of mournful voices that sounded very pathetic and sad, and died away into a low strain again; but that was all we heard.

At another time there was the Exhibition of the Relics in St. Peter's, which took place at between six and seven o'clock in the evening, and was striking, from the cathedral being dark and gloomy, and having a great many people in it. The place into which the relics were brought, one by one, by a party of three priests, was a high balcony near the chief altar. This was the only lighted part of the church. There are always a hundred and twelve lamps burning near the altar, and there were two tall tapers, besides, near the black statue of St. Peter; but these were nothing in such an immense edifice. The gloom, and the general upturning of faces to the balcony, and the prostration of true believers on the pavement, as shining objects, like pictures or looking-glasses, were brought out and shown, had something effective in it, despite the very preposterous manner in which they were held up for the general edification, and the great elevation at which they were displayed; which one would think rather calculated to diminish the comfort derivable from a full conviction of their being genuine.

On the Thursday we went to see the Pope convey the Sacrament from the Sistine Chapel, to deposit it in the Capella Paolina, another chapel in the Vatican;—a ceremony emblematical of the entombment of the Saviour before His Resurrection. We waited in a great gallery with a great crowd of people (three-fourths of them English) for an hour or so, while they were chanting the Miserere in the Sistine Chapel again. Both chapels opened out of the gallery; and the general attention was concentrated on the occasional opening and shutting of the door of the one for which the Pope was ultimately bound. None of these openings disclosed anything more tremendous than a man on a ladder, lighting a great quantity of candles; but, at each and every opening, there was a terrific rush made at this ladder and this man, something like (I should think) a charge of the heavy British cavalry at Waterloo. The man was never brought down, however, nor the ladder; for it performed the strangest antics in the world among the crowd—where it was carried by the man, when the candles were all lighted; and finally it was stuck up against the gallery wall, in a very disorderly manner, just before the opening of the other chapel, and the commencement of a new chant, announced the approach of his Holiness. At this crisis, the soldiers of the

guard, who had been poking the crowd into all sorts of shapes, formed down the gallery: and the procession came up, between the two lines they made.

There were a few choristers, and then a great many priests, walking two and two, and carrying — the good-looking priests, at least — their lighted tapers, so as to throw the light with a good effect upon their faces: for the room was darkened. Those who were not handsome, or who had not long beards, carried *their* tapers anyhow, and abandoned themselves to spiritual contemplation. Meanwhile, the chanting was very monotonous and dreary. The procession passed on, slowly, into the chapel, and the drone of voices went on, and came on, with it, until the Pope himself appeared, walking under a white satin canopy, and bearing the covered Sacrament in both hands; Cardinals and Canons, clustered round him, making a brilliant show. The soldiers of the guard knelt down as he passed; all the bystanders bowed; and so he passed on into the chapel: the white satin canopy being removed from over him at the door, and a white satin parasol hoisted over his poor old head, in place of it. A few more couples brought up the rear, and passed into the chapel also. Then, the chapel door was shut; and it was all over; and everybody hurried off headlong, as for life or death, to see something else, and say it wasn't worth the trouble.

I think the most popular and most crowded sight (excepting those of Easter Sunday and Monday, which are open to all classes of people) was the Pope washing the feet of Thirteen men, representing the twelve apostles, and Judas Iscariot. The place in which this pious office is performed is one of the chapels of St. Peter's, which is gaily decorated for the occasion; the Thirteen sitting "all of a row," on a very high bench, and looking particularly uncomfortable, with the eyes of Heaven knows how many English, French, Americans, Swiss, Germans, Russians, Swedes, Norwegians, and other foreigners nailed to their faces all the time. They are robed in white; and on their heads they wear a stiff white cap, like a large English porter pot without a handle. Each carries in his hand a nosegay, of the size of a fine cauliflower; and two of them, on this occasion, wore spectacles: which, remembering the characters they sustained, I thought a droll appendage to the costume. There was a great eye to character. St. John was represented by a good-looking young man; St. Peter, by a grave-looking old gentleman, with a flowing brown beard; and Judas Iscariot by such an enormous hypocrite (I could not make out, though, whether the expression of his face was real or assumed), that if he had acted the part to the death, and had gone away and hanged himself, he would have left nothing to be desired.

As the two large boxes appropriated to ladies, at this sight, were full to the throat, and getting near was hopeless, we posted off, along with a great crowd, to be in time at the Table, where the Pope, in person, waits on these Thirteen; and after a prodigious struggle at the Vatican staircase, and several personal conflicts with the Swiss Guard, the whole crowd swept into the room. It was a long gallery, hung with drapery of white and red, with another great box for ladies (who are obliged to dress in black at these ceremonies, and to wear black veils), a royal box for the King of Naples and his party; and the table itself, which, set out like a ball supper, and ornamented with golden figures of the real apostles, was arranged on an elevated platform on one side of the gallery. The counterfeit apostles' knives and forks were laid out on that side of the table which was nearest to the wall, so that they might be stared at again without let or hindrance.

The body of the room was full of male strangers; the crowd immense; the heat very great; and the pressure sometimes frightful. It was at its height when the stream came pouring in from the feet-washing; and then there were such shrieks and outcries, that a party of Piedmontese dragoons went to the rescue of the Swiss Guard, and helped them to calm the tumult.

The ladies were particularly ferocious in their struggles for places. One lady of my acquaintance was seized round the waist in the ladies' box, by a strong matron, and hoisted out of her place; and there was another lady (in a back row in the same box) who improved her position by sticking a large pin into the ladies before her.

The gentlemen about me were remarkably anxious to see what was on the table; and one Englishman seemed to have embarked the whole energy of his nature in the determination to discover whether there was any mustard. "By Jupiter, there's vinegar!" I heard him say to his friend, after he had stood on tiptoe an immense time, and had been crushed and beaten on all sides. "And there's oil!! I saw them distinctly, in cruets! Can any gentleman, in front there, see mustard on the table? Sir, will you oblige me? *Do* you see a Mustard-pot?"

The apostles and Judas appearing on the

platform, after much expectation, were marshalled, in line, in front of the table, with Peter at the top; and a good long stare was taken at them by the company, while twelve of them took a long smell at their nosegays, and Judas —moving his lips very obtrusively—engaged in inward prayer. Then, the Pope, clad in a scarlet robe, and wearing on his head a skull-cap of white satin, appeared in the midst of a crowd of Cardinals and other dignitaries, and took in his hand a little golden ewer, from which he poured a little water over one of Peter's hands, while one attendant held a golden basin; a second, a fine cloth; a third, Peter's nosegay, which was taken from him during the operation. This his Holiness performed, with considerable expedition, on every man in the line (Judas I observed to be particularly overcome by his condescension); and then the whole Thirteen sat down to dinner. Grace said by the Pope. Peter in the chair.

There was white wine, and red wine: and the dinner looked very good. The courses appeared in portions, one for each apostle; and these being presented to the Pope, by Cardinals upon their knees, were by him handed to the Thirteen. The manner in which Judas grew more white-livered over his victuals, and languished, with his head on one side, as if he had no appetite, defies all description. Peter was a good, sound old man, and went in, as the saying is, "to win;" eating everything that was given him (he got the best: being first in the row), and saying nothing to anybody. The dishes appeared to be chiefly composed of fish and vegetables. The Pope helped the Thirteen to wine also; and, during the whole dinner, somebody read something aloud, out of a large book—the Bible, I presume—which nobody could hear, and to which nobody paid the least attention. The Cardinals, and other attendants, smiled to each other, from time to time, as if the thing were a great farce; and if they thought so, there is little doubt they were perfectly right. His Holiness did what he had to do, as a sensible man gets through a troublesome ceremony, and seemed very glad when it was all over.

The Pilgrims' Suppers: where lords and ladies waited on the Pilgrims, in token of humility, and dried their feet when they had been well washed by deputy: were very attractive. But, of all the many spectacles of dangerous reliance on outward observances, in themselves mere empty forms, none struck me half so much as the Scala Santa, or Holy Staircase, which I saw several times, but to the greatest advantage, or disadvantage, on Good Friday.

This holy staircase is composed of eight-and-twenty steps, said to have belonged to Pontius Pilate's house, and to be the identical stairs on which Our Saviour trod, in coming down from the judgment-seat. Pilgrims ascend it, only on their knees. It is steep; and, at the summit, is a chapel, reported to be full of relics; into which they peep through some iron bars, and then come down again by one of two side-staircases, which are not sacred, and may be walked on.

On Good Friday there were, on a moderate computation, a hundred people slowly shuffling up these stairs, on their knees, at one time; while others, who were going up, or had come down—and a few who had done both, and were going up again for the second time—stood loitering in the porch below, where an old gentleman, in a sort of watch-box, rattled a tin canister, with a slit in the top, incessantly, to remind them that he took the money. The majority were country-people, male and female. There were four or five Jesuit priests, however, and some half-dozen well-dressed women. A whole school of boys, twenty at least, were about half-way up —evidently enjoying it very much. They were all wedged together pretty closely; but the rest of the company gave the boys as wide a berth as possible, in consequence of their betraying some recklessness in the management of their boots.

I never, in my life, saw anything at once so ridiculous, and so unpleasant, as this sight—ridiculous in the absurd incidents inseparable from it; and unpleasant in its senseless and unmeaning degradation. There are two steps to begin with, and then a rather broad landing. The more rigid climbers went along this landing on their knees, as well as up the stairs; and the figures they cut, in their shuffling progress over the level surface, no description can paint. Then, to see them watch their opportunity from the porch, and cut in where there was a place next the wall! And to see one man with an umbrella (brought on purpose, for it was a fine day) hoisting himself, unlawfully, from stair to stair! And to observe a demure lady of fifty-five or so, looking back, every now and then, to assure herself that her legs were properly disposed!

There were such odd differences in the speed of different people, too. Some got on as if they were doing a match against time; others stopped to say a prayer on every step. This man touched every stair with his forehead, and kissed it; that man scratched his head all the way. The boys got on brilliantly, and were up and down again before the old lady had accomplished her half-dozen stairs. But most of the Penitents came

down very sprightly and fresh, as having done a real good substantial deed, which it would take a good deal of sin to counterbalance; and the old gentleman in the watch-box was down upon them with his canister while they were in this humour, I promise you.

As if such a progress were not in its nature inevitably droll enough, there lay, on the top of the stairs, a wooden figure on a crucifix, resting on a sort of great iron saucer; so rickety and unsteady, that whenever an enthusiastic person kissed the figure with more than usual devotion, or threw a coin into the saucer with more than common readiness (for it served in this respect as a second or supplementary canister), it gave a great leap and rattle, and nearly shook the attendant lamp out: horribly frightening the people further down, and throwing the guilty party into unspeakable embarrassment.

On Easter Sunday, as well as on the preceding Thursday, the Pope bestows his benediction on the people from the balcony in front of St. Peter's. This Easter Sunday was a day so bright and blue: so cloudless, balmy, wonderfully bright: that all the previous bad weather vanished from the recollection in a moment. I had seen the Thursday's benediction dropping damply on some hundreds of umbrellas, but there was not a sparkle then in all the hundred fountains of Rome—such fountains as they are!—and, on this Sunday morning, they were running diamonds. The miles of miserable streets through which we drove (compelled to a certain course by the Pope's dragoons: the Roman police on such occasions) were so full of colour, that nothing in them was capable of wearing a faded aspect. The common people came out in their gayest dresses; the richer people in their smartest vehicles; Cardinals rattled to the church of the Poor Fishermen in their state carriages; shabby magnificence flaunted its threadbare liveries and tarnished cocked-hats in the sun; and every coach in Rome was put in requisition for the Great Piazza of St. Peter's.

One hundred and fifty thousand people were there at least! Yet there was ample room. How many carriages were there I don't know; yet there was room for them too, and to spare. The great steps of the church were densely crowded. There were many of the Contadini, from Albano (who delight in red), in that part of the square, and the mingling of bright colours in the crowd was beautiful. Below the steps the troops were ranged. In the magnificent proportions of the place, they looked like a bed of flowers. Sulky Romans, lively peasants from the neighbouring country, groups of pilgrims from distant parts of Italy, sight-seeing foreigners of all nations, made a murmur in the clear air, like so many insects; and high above them all, plashing and bubbling, and making rainbow colours in the light, the two delicious fountains welled and tumbled bountifully.

A kind of bright carpet was hung over the front of the balcony; and the sides of the great window were bedecked with crimson drapery. An awning was stretched, too, over the top, to screen the old man from the hot rays of the sun. As noon approached, all eyes were turned up to this window. In due time the chair was seen approaching to the front, with the gigantic fans of peacock's feathers close behind. The doll within it (for the balcony is very high) then rose up, and stretched out its tiny arms, while all the male spectators in the square uncovered, and some, but not by any means the greater part, kneeled down. The guns upon the ramparts of the Castle of St. Angelo proclaimed, next moment, that the benediction was given; drums beat; trumpets sounded; arms clashed; and the great mass below, suddenly breaking into smaller heaps, and scattering here and there in rills, was stirred like party-coloured sand.

What a bright noon it was as we rode away! The Tiber was no longer yellow, but blue. There was a blush on the old bridges, that made them fresh and hale again. The Pantheon, with its majestic front, all seamed and furrowed like an old face, had summer light upon its battered walls. Every squalid and desolate hut in the Eternal City (bear witness, every grim old palace, to the filth and misery of the plebeian neighbour that elbows it, as certain as Time has laid its grip on its patrician head!) was fresh and new with some ray of the sun. The very prison in the crowded street, a whirl of carriages and people, had some stray sense of the day, dropping through its chinks and crevices: and dismal prisoners, who could not wind their faces round the barricading of the blocked-up windows, stretched out their hands, and clinging to the rusty bars, turned *them* towards the overflowing street: as if it were a cheerful fire, and could be shared in that way.

But, when the night came on, without a cloud to dim the full moon, what a sight it was to see the Great Square full once more, and the whole church, from the cross to the ground, lighted with innumerable lanterns, tracing out the architecture, and winking and shining all round the colonnade of the Piazza! And what a sense of exultation, joy, delight, it was, when the great bell struck half-past seven—on the instant—to behold one bright red mass of fire

soar gallantly from the top of the cupola to the extremest summit of the cross, and, the moment it leaped into its place, become the signal of a bursting out of countless lights, as great, and red, and blazing as itself, from every part of the gigantic church; so that every cornice, capital, and smallest ornament of stone expressed itself in fire: and the black, solid groundwork of the enormous dome seemed to grow transparent as an egg-shell!

A train of gunpowder, an electric chain—nothing could be fired more suddenly and swiftly than this second illumination; and when we had got away, and gone upon a distant height, and looked towards it two hours afterwards, there it still stood, shining and glittering in the calm night like a jewel! Not a line of its proportions wanting; not an angle blunted; not an atom of its radiance lost.

The next night—Easter Monday—there was a great display of fireworks from the Castle of St. Angelo. We hired a room in an opposite house, and made our way to our places in good time, through a dense mob of people choking up the square in front, and all the avenues leading to it; and so loading the bridge by which the castle is approached, that it seemed ready to sink into the rapid Tiber below. There are statues on this bridge (execrable works), and, among them, great vessels full of burning tow were placed: glaring strangely on the faces of the crowd, and not less strangely on the stone counterfeits above them.

The show began with a tremendous discharge of cannon; and then, for twenty minutes, or half an hour, the whole castle was one incessant sheet of fire, and labyrinth of blazing wheels of every colour, size, and speed: while rockets streamed into the sky, not by ones or twos, or scores, but hundreds at a time. The concluding burst—the Girandola—was like the blowing up into the air of the whole massive castle, without smoke or dust.

In half an hour afterwards the immense concourse had dispersed; the moon was looking calmly down upon her wrinkled image in the river; and half-a-dozen men and boys, with bits of lighted candle in their hands: moving here and there, in search of anything worth having, that might have been dropped in the press: had the whole scene to themselves.

By way of contrast, we rode out into old ruined Rome, after all this firing and booming, to take our leave of the Coliseum. I had seen it by moonlight before (I never could get through a day without going back to it), but its tremendous solitude that night is past all telling. The ghostly pillars in the Forum; the Triumphal Arches of Old Emperors; those enormous masses of ruin which were once their palaces; the grass-grown mounds that mark the graves of ruined temples; the stones of the Via Sacra, smooth with the tread of feet in ancient Rome; even these were dimmed, in their transcendent melancholy, by the dark ghost of its bloody holidays, erect and grim; haunting the old scene; despoiled by pillaging Popes and fighting Princes, but not laid; wringing wild hands of weed, and grass, and bramble; and lamenting to the night in every gap and broken arch—the shadow of its awful self, immovable!

As we lay down on the grass of the Campagna next day, on our way to Florence, hearing the larks sing, we saw that a little wooden cross had been erected on the spot where the poor Pilgrim Countess was murdered. So we piled some loose stones about it, as the beginning of a mound to her memory, and wondered if we should ever rest there again, and look back at Rome.

A RAPID DIORAMA.

WE are bound for Naples! And we cross the threshold of the Eternal City at yonder gate, the Gate of San Giovanni Laterano, where the two last objects that attract the notice of a departing visitor, and the two first objects that attract the notice of an arriving one, are a proud church and a decaying ruin—good emblems of Rome.

Our way lies over the Campagna, which looks more solemn on a bright blue day like this, than beneath a darker sky; the great extent of ruin being plainer to the eye: and the sunshine through the arches of the broken aqueducts, showing other broken arches shining through them in the melancholy distance. When we have traversed it, and look back from Albano, its dark, undulating surface lies below us like a stagnant lake, or like a broad, dull Lethe flowing round the walls of Rome, and separating it from all the world! How often have the Legions, in triumphant march, gone glittering across that purple waste, so silent and unpeopled now! How often has the train of captives looked, with sinking hearts, upon the distant city, and beheld its population pouring out to hail the return of their conqueror! What riot, sensuality, and

murder have run mad in the vast palaces now heaps of brick and shattered marble! What glare of fires, and roar of popular tumult, and wail of pestilence and famine, have come sweeping over the wild plain, where nothing is now heard but the wind, and where the solitary lizards gambol unmolested in the sun!

The train of wine-carts going into Rome, each driven by a shaggy peasant reclining beneath a little gipsy-fashioned canopy of sheep-skin, is ended now, and we go toiling up into a higher country where there are trees. The next day brings us on the Pontine Marshes, wearily flat and lonesome, and overgrown with brushwood, and swamped with water, but with a fine road made across them, shaded by a long, long avenue. Here and there we pass a solitary guard-house; here and there a hovel, deserted, and walled up. Some herdsmen loiter on the banks of the stream beside the road, and sometimes a flat-bottomed boat, towed by a man, comes rippling idly along it. A horseman passes occasionally, carrying a long gun crosswise on the saddle before him, and attended by fierce dogs; but there is nothing else astir, save the wind and the shadows, until we come in sight of Terracina.

How blue and bright the sea, rolling below the windows of the inn so famous in robber stories! How picturesque the great crags and points of rock overhanging to-morrow's narrow road, where galley-slaves are working in the quarries above, and the sentinels who guard them lounge on the seashore! All night there is the murmur of the sea beneath the stars; and, in the morning, just at daybreak, the prospect suddenly becoming expanded, as if by a miracle, reveals—in the far distance, across the sea there!—Naples with its islands, and Vesuvius spouting fire! Within a quarter of an hour, the whole is gone as if it were a vision in the clouds, and there is nothing but the sea and sky.

The Neapolitan frontier crossed, after two hours' travelling; and the hungriest of soldiers and custom-house officers with difficulty appeased; we enter, by a gateless portal, into the first Neapolitan town—Fondi. Take note of Fondi, in the name of all that is wretched and beggarly.

A filthy channel of mud and refuse meanders down the centre of the miserable streets, fed by obscene rivulets that trickle from the abject houses. There is not a door, a window, or a shutter; not a roof, a wall, a post, or a pillar, in all Fondi, but is decayed, and crazy, and rotting away. The wretched history of the town, with all its sieges and pillages by Barbarossa and the rest, might have been acted last year. How the gaunt dogs that sneak about the miserable streets come to be alive, and undevoured by the people, is one of the enigmas of the world.

A hollow-cheeked and scowling people they are! All beggars; but that's nothing. Look at them as they gather round. Some are too indolent to come down-stairs, or are too wisely mistrustful of the stairs, perhaps, to venture: so stretch out their lean hands from upper windows, and howl; others come flocking about us, fighting and jostling one another, and demanding, incessantly, charity for the love of God, charity for the love of the Blessed Virgin, charity for the love of all the Saints. A group of miserable children, almost naked, screaming forth the same petition, discover that they can see themselves reflected in the varnish of the carriage, and begin to dance and make grimaces, that they may have the pleasure of seeing their antics repeated in this mirror. A crippled idiot, in the act of striking one of them who drowns his clamorous demand for charity, observes his angry counterpart in the panel, stops short, and, thrusting out his tongue, begins to wag his head and chatter. The shrill cry raised at this awakens half-a-dozen wild creatures wrapped in frouzy brown cloaks, who are lying on the church steps with pots and pans for sale. These, scrambling up, approach, and beg defiantly. "I am hungry. Give me something. Listen to me, Signore. I am hungry!" Then, a ghastly old woman, fearful of being too late, comes hobbling down the street, stretching out one hand, and scratching herself all the way with the other, and screaming, long before she can be heard, "Charity, charity! I'll go and pray for you directly, beautiful lady, if you'll give me charity!" Lastly, the members of a brotherhood for burying the dead: hideously masked, and attired in shabby black robes, white at the skirts, with the splashes of many muddy winters: escorted by a dirty priest, and a congenial cross-bearer: come hurrying past. Surrounded by this motley concourse, we move out of Fondi: bad bright eyes glaring at us, out of the darkness of every crazy tenement, like glistening fragments of its filth and putrefaction.

A noble mountain pass, with the ruins of a fort on a strong eminence, traditionally called the Fort of Fra Diavolo; the old town of Itri, like a device in pastry, built up, almost perpendicularly, on a hill, and approached by long

steep flights of steps; beautiful Mola di Gaëta, whose wines, like those of Albano, have degenerated since the days of Horace, or his taste for wine was bad: which is not likely of one who enjoyed it so much, and extolled it so well; another night upon the road at St. Agata; a rest next day at Capua, which is picturesque, but hardly so seductive to a traveller now as the soldiers of Prætorian Rome were wont to find the ancient city of that name; a flat road among vines festooned and looped from tree to tree; and Mount Vesuvius close at hand at last!—its cone and summit whitened with snow; and its smoke hanging over it, in the heavy atmosphere of the day, like a dense cloud. So we go, rattling downhill, into Naples.

A funeral is coming up the street, towards us. The body, on an open bier, borne on a kind of palanquin, covered with a gay cloth of crimson and gold. The mourners in white gowns and masks. If there be death abroad, life is well represented too, for all Naples would seem to be out of doors, and tearing to and fro in carriages. Some of these, the common Vetturino vehicles, are drawn by three horses abreast, decked with smart trappings and great abundance of brazen ornament, and always going very fast. Not that their loads are light; for the smallest of them has at least six people inside, four in front, four or five more hanging on behind, and two or three more in a net or bag below the axletree, where they lie half suffocated with mud and dust. Exhibitors of Punch, buffo singers with guitars, reciters of poetry, reciters of stories, a row of cheap exhibitions with clowns and showmen, drums and trumpets, painted cloths representing the wonders within, and admiring crowds assembled without, assist the whirl and bustle. Ragged lazzaroni lie asleep in doorways, archways, and kennels; the gentry, gaily dressed, are dashing up and down in carriages on the Chiaja, or walking in the Public Gardens; and quiet letter-writers, perched behind their little desks and inkstands under the Portico of the Great Theatre of San Carlo, in the public street, are waiting for clients.

Here is a galley-slave in chains, who wants a letter written to a friend. He approaches a clerkly-looking man, sitting under the corner arch, and makes his bargain. He has obtained permission of the sentinel who guards him: who stands near, leaning against the wall and cracking nuts. The galley-slave dictates in the ear of the letter-writer what he desires to say; and, as he can't read writing, looks intently in his face, to read there whether he sets down faithfully what he is told. After a time the galley-slave becomes discursive—incoherent. The secretary pauses and rubs his chin. The galley-slave is voluble and energetic. The secretary, at length, catches the idea, and, with the air of a man who knows how to word it, sets it down; stopping, now and then, to glance back at his text admiringly. The galley-slave is silent. The soldier stoically cracks his nuts. Is there anything more to say? inquires the letter-writer. No more. Then listen, friend of mine. He reads it through. The galley-slave is quite enchanted. It is folded, and addressed, and given to him, and he pays the fee. The secretary falls back indolently in his chair, and takes a book. The galley-slave gathers up an empty sack. The sentinel throws away a handful of nutshells, shoulders his musket, and away they go together.

Why do the beggars rap their chins constantly with their right hands, when you look at them? Everything is done in pantomime in Naples, and that is the conventional sign for hunger. A man who is quarrelling with another, yonder, lays the palm of his right hand on the back of his left, and shakes the two thumbs—expressive of a donkey's ears—whereat his adversary is goaded to desperation. Two people bargaining for fish, the buyer empties an imaginary waistcoat pocket when he is told the price, and walks away without a word: having thoroughly conveyed to the seller that he considers it too dear. Two people in carriages, meeting, one touches his lips twice or thrice, holding up the five fingers of his right hand, and gives a horizontal cut in the air with the palm. The other nods briskly, and goes his way. He has been invited to a friendly dinner at half-past five o'clock, and will certainly come.

All over Italy, a peculiar shake of the right hand from the wrist, with the forefinger stretched out, expresses a negative—the only negative beggars will ever understand. But, in Naples, those five fingers are a copious language.

All this, and every other kind of outdoor life and stir, and macaroni-eating at sunset, and flower-selling all day long, and begging and stealing everywhere and at all hours, you see upon the bright seashore, where the waves of the bay sparkle merrily. But, lovers and hunters of the picturesque, let us not keep too studiously out of view the miserable depravity, degradation, and wretchedness with which this gay Neapolitan life is inseparably associated! It is not well to find St. Giles's so repulsive, and the Porta Capuana so attractive. A pair of naked legs and a ragged red scarf do not make *all* the difference between what is interesting and what

is coarse and odious. Painting and poetising for ever, if you will, the beauties of this most beautiful and lovely spot of earth, let us, as our duty, try to associate a new picturesque with some faint recognition of man's destiny and capabilities; more hopeful, I believe, among the ice and snow of the North Pole, than in the sun and bloom of Naples.

Capri—once made odious by the deified beast Tiberius—Iscnia, Procida, and the thousand distant beauties of the Bay, lie in the blue sea yonder, changing in the mist and sunshine

PRIESTS AND MONKS.

twenty times a day: now close at hand, now far off, now unseen. The fairest country in the world is spread about us. Whether we turn towards the Miseno shore of the splendid watery amphitheatre, and go by the Grotto of Posilipo to the Grotto del Cane, and away to Baiæ: or take the other way, towards Vesuvius and Sorrento: it is one succession of delights. In the last-named direction, where, over doors and archways, there are countless little images of San Gennaro, with his Canute's hand stretched out to check the fury of the Burning Mountain,

we are carried pleasantly, by a railroad on the beautiful Sea Beach, past the town of Torre del Greco, built upon the ashes of the former town, destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius within a hundred years; and past the flat-roofed houses, granaries, and macaroni manufactories: to Castel-a-Mare, with its ruined castle, now inhabited by fishermen, standing in the sea upon a heap of rocks. Here the railroad terminates; but, hence we may ride on, by an unbroken succession of enchanting bays, and beautiful scenery, sloping from the highest summit of St. Angelo, the highest neighbouring mountain, down to the water's edge—among vineyards, olive-trees, gardens of oranges and lemons, orchards, heaped-up rocks, green gorges in the hills—and by the bases of snow-covered heights, and through small towns with handsome, dark-haired women at the doors—and pass delicious summer villas—to Sorrento, where the Poet Tasso drew his inspiration from the beauty surrounding him. Returning, we may climb the heights above Castel-a-Mare, and, looking down among the boughs and leaves, see the crisp water glistening in the sun; and clusters of white houses in distant Naples, dwindling, in the great extent of prospect, down to dice. The coming back to the city, by the beach again, at sunset: with the glowing sea on one side, and the darkening mountain, with its smoke and flame, upon the other: is a sublime conclusion to the glory of the day.

That church by the Porta Capuana—near the old fisher-market in the dirtiest quarter of dirty Naples, where the revolt of Masaniello began—is memorable for having been the scene of one of his earliest proclamations to the people, and is particularly remarkable for nothing else, unless it be its waxen and bejewelled Saint in a glass case, with two odd hands; or the enormous number of beggars who are constantly rapping their chins there, like a battery of castanets. The cathedral with the beautiful door, and the columns of African and Egyptian granite that once ornamented the Temple of Apollo, contains the famous sacred blood of San Gennaro or Januarius: which is preserved in two phials in a silver tabernacle, and miraculously liquefies three times a year, to the great admiration of the people. At the same moment, the stone (distant some miles) where the Saint suffered martyrdom becomes faintly red. It is said that the officiating priests turn faintly red also, sometimes, when these miracles occur.

The old, old men who live in hovels at the entrance of these ancient catacombs, and who, in their age and infirmity, seem waiting here to be buried themselves, are members of a curious body, called the Royal Hospital, who are the official attendants at funerals. Two of these old spectres totter away, with lighted tapers, to show the caverns of death—as unconcerned as if they were immortal. They were used as burying-places for three hundred years; and in one part is a large pit full of skulls and bones, said to be the sad remains of a great mortality occasioned by a plague. In the rest there is nothing but dust. They consist, chiefly, of great wide corridors and labyrinths, hewn out of the rock. At the end of some of these long passages are unexpected glimpses of the daylight, shining down from above. It looks as ghastly and as strange: among the torches and the dust, and the dark vaults: as if it, too, were dead and buried.

The present burial-place lies out yonder, on a hill between the city and Vesuvius. The old Campo Santo, with its three hundred and sixty-five pits, is only used for those who die in hospitals and prisons, and are unclaimed by their friends. The graceful new cemetery, at no great distance from it, though yet unfinished, has already many graves among its shrubs and flowers, and airy colonnades. It might be reasonably objected elsewhere, that some of the tombs are meretricious and too fanciful; but the general brightness seems to justify it here; and Mount Vesuvius, separated from them by a lovely slope of ground, exalts and saddens the scene.

If it be solemn to behold from this new City of the Dead, with its dark smoke hanging in the clear sky, how much more awful and impressive is it, viewed from the ghostly ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii!

Stand at the bottom of the great market-place of Pompeii, and look up the silent streets, through the ruined temples of Jupiter and Isis, over the broken houses with their inmost sanctuaries open to the day, away to Mount Vesuvius, bright and snowy in the peaceful distance; and lose all count of time, and heed of other things, in the strange and melancholy sensation of seeing the Destroyed and the Destroyer making this quiet picture in the sun. Then, ramble on, and see, at every turn, the little familiar tokens of human habitation and every-day pursuits; the chafing of the bucket rope in the stone rim of the exhausted well; the track of carriage wheels in the pavement of the street; the marks of drinking vessels on the stone counter of the wine-shop; the amphoræ in private cellars, stored away so many hundred years ago, and undisturbed to this hour—all rendering the soli-

tude and deadly lonesomeness of the place ten thousand times more solemn than if the volcano, in its fury, had swept the city from the earth, and sunk it in the bottom of the sea.

After it was shaken by the earthquake which preceded the eruption, workmen were employed in shaping out, in stone, new ornaments for temples and other buildings that had suffered. Here lies their work, outside the city gate, as if they would return to-morrow.

In the cellar of Diomede's house, where certain skeletons were found huddled together, close to the door, the impression of their bodies on the ashes, hardened with the ashes, and became stamped and fixed there, after they had shrunk, inside, to scanty bones. So, in the theatre of Herculaneum, a comic mask, floating on the stream when it was hot and liquid, stamped its mimic features in it as it hardened into stone; and now, it turns upon the stranger the fantastic look it turned upon the audiences in that same theatre two thousand years ago.

Next to the wonder of going up and down the streets, and in and out of the houses, and traversing the secret chambers of the temples of a religion that has vanished from the earth, and finding so many fresh traces of remote antiquity: as if the course of Time had been stopped after this desolation, and there had been no nights and days, months, years, and centuries since: nothing is more impressive and terrible than the many evidences of the searching nature of the ashes, as bespeaking their irresistible power, and the impossibility of escaping them. In the wine-cellars, they forced their way into the earthen vessels: displacing the wine, and choking them, to the brim, with dust. In the tombs, they forced the ashes of the dead from the funeral urns, and rained new ruin even into them. The mouths, and eyes, and skulls of all the skeletons were stuffed with this terrible hail. In Herculaneum, where the flood was of a different and a heavier kind, it rolled in like a sea. Imagine a deluge of water turned to marble, at its height—and that is what is called "the lava" here.

Some workmen were digging the gloomy well on the brink of which we now stand, looking down, when they came on some of the stone benches of the theatre—those steps (for such they seem) at the bottom of the excavation—and found the buried city of Herculaneum. Presently going down, with lighted torches, we are perplexed by great walls of monstrous thickness, rising up between the benches, shutting out the stage, obtruding their shapeless forms in absurd places, confusing the whole plan, and making it a disordered dream. We cannot, at first, believe, or picture to ourselves, that THIS came rolling in, and drowned the city; and that all that is not here has been cut away, by the axe, like solid stone. But this perceived and understood, the horror and oppression of its presence are indescribable.

Many of the paintings on the walls in the roofless chambers of both cities, or carefully removed to the museum at Naples, are as fresh and plain as if they had been executed yesterday. Here are subjects of still life, as provisions, dead game, bottles, glasses, and the like; familiar classical stories, or mythological fables, always forcibly and plainly told; conceits of Cupids, quarrelling, sporting, working at trades; theatrical rehearsals; poets reading their productions to their friends; inscriptions chalked upon the walls; political squibs, advertisements, rough drawings by school-boys; everything to people and restore the ancient cities in the fancy of their wondering visitor. Furniture, too, you see, of every kind—lamps, tables, couches; vessels for eating, drinking, and cooking; workmen's tools, surgical instruments, tickets for the theatre, pieces of money, personal ornaments, bunches of keys found clenched in the grasp of skeletons, helmets of guards and warriors; little household bells, yet musical with their old domestic tones.

The least among these objects lends its aid to swell the interest of Vesuvius, and invest it with a perfect fascination. The looking, from either ruined city, into the neighbouring grounds overgrown with beautiful vines and luxuriant trees; and remembering that house upon house, temple on temple, building after building, and street after street, are still lying underneath the roots of all the quiet cultivation, waiting to be turned up to the light of day; is something so wonderful, so full of mystery, so captivating to the imagination, that one would think it would be paramount, and yield to nothing else. To nothing but Vesuvius; but the mountain is the genius of the scene. From every indication of the ruin it has worked, we look, again, with an absorbing interest to where its smoke is rising up into the sky. It is beyond us, as we thread the ruined streets: above us, as we stand upon the ruined walls; we follow it through every vista of broken columns, as we wander through the empty courtyards of the houses; and through the garlandings and interlacings of every wanton vine. Turning away to Pæstum yonder, to see the awful structures built, the least aged of them hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and standing yet, erect in lonely

majesty, upon the wild malaria-blighted plain—we watch Vesuvius as it disappears from the prospect, and watch for it again, on our return, with the same thrill of interest: as the doom and destiny of all this beautiful country, biding its terrible time.

It is very warm in the sun, on this early spring day, when we return from Pæstum, but very cold in the shade: insomuch that although we may lunch pleasantly, at noon, in the open air, by the gate of Pompeii, the neighbouring rivulet supplies thick ice for our wine. But, the sun is shining brightly; there is not a cloud or speck of vapour in the whole blue sky looking down upon the Bay of Naples; and the moon will be at the full to-night. No matter that the snow and ice lie thick upon the summit of Vesuvius, or that we have been on foot all day at Pompeii, or that croakers maintain that strangers should not be on the mountain by night, in such an unusual season. Let us take advantage of the fine weather; make the best of our way to Resina, the little village at the foot of the mountain; prepare ourselves, as well as we can on so short a notice, at the guide's house; ascend at once, and have sunset half-way up, moonlight at the top, and midnight to come down in!

At four o'clock in the afternoon there is a terrible uproar in the little stable-yard of Signore Salvatore, the recognised head guide, with the gold band round his cap; and thirty under-guides, who are all scuffling and screaming at once, are preparing half-a-dozen saddled ponies, three litters, and some stout staves for the journey. Every one of the thirty quarrels with the other twenty-nine, and frightens the six ponies; and as much of the village as can possibly squeeze itself into the little stable-yard participates in the tumult, and gets trodden on by the cattle.

After much violent skirmishing, and more noise than would suffice for the storming of Naples, the procession starts. The head guide, who is liberally paid for all the attendants, rides a little in advance of the party; the other thirty guides proceed on foot. Eight go forward with the litters that are to be used by-and-by; and the remaining two-and-twenty beg.

We ascend, gradually, by stony lanes like rough broad flights of stairs, for some time. At length we leave these, and the vineyards on either side of them, and emerge upon a bleak, bare region, where the lava lies confusedly in enormous rusty masses: as if the earth had been ploughed up by burning thunderbolts. And now we halt to see the sun set. The change that falls upon the dreary region, and on the whole mountain, as its red light fades, and the night comes on—and the unutterable solemnity and dreariness that reign around, who that has witnessed it can ever forget?

It is dark when, after winding for some time over the broken ground, we arrive at the foot of the cone: which is extremely steep, and seems to rise, almost perpendicularly, from the spot where we dismount. The only light is reflected from the snow, deep, hard, and white, with which the cone is covered. It is now intensely cold, and the air is piercing. The thirty-one have brought no torches, knowing that the moon will rise before we reach the top. Two of the litters are devoted to the two ladies; the third, to a rather heavy gentleman from Naples, whose hospitality and good-nature have attached him to the expedition, and determined him to assist in doing the honours of the mountain. The rather heavy gentleman is carried by fifteen men; each of the ladies by half-a-dozen. We who walk make the best use of our staves; and so the whole party begin to labour upward over the snow,—as if they were toiling to the summit of an antediluvian twelfth-cake.

We are a long time toiling up; and the head guide looks oddly about him when one of the company—not an Italian, though an habitué of the mountain for many years: whom we will call, for our present purpose, Mr. Pickle of Portici—suggests that, as it is freezing hard, and the usual footing of ashes is covered by the snow and ice, it will surely be difficult to descend. But the sight of the litters above, tilting up and down, and jerking from this side to that, as the bearers continually slip and stumble, diverts our attention: more especially as the whole length of the rather heavy gentleman is, at that moment, presented to us alarmingly foreshortened, with his head downwards.

The rising of the moon, soon afterwards, revives the flagging spirits of the bearers. Stimulating each other with their usual watchword, "Courage, friend! It is to eat macaroni!" they press on, gallantly, for the summit.

From tinging the top of the snow above us with a band of light, and pouring it in a stream through the valley below, while we have been ascending in the dark, the moon soon lights the whole white mountain-side, and the broad sea down below, and tiny Naples in the distance, and every village in the country round. The whole prospect is in this lovely state, when we come upon the platform on the mountain-top—the region of Fire—an exhausted crater formed of great masses of gigantic cinders, like blocks of stone from some tremendous water-fall, burnt

up; from every chink and crevice of which hot, sulphurous smoke is pouring out: while, from another conical-shaped hill, the present crater, rising abruptly from this platform at the end, great sheets of fire are streaming forth: reddening the night with flame, blackening it with smoke, and spotting it with red-hot stones and cinders, that fly up into the air like feathers, and fall down like lead. What words can paint the gloom and grandeur of this scene?

The broken ground; the smoke; the sense of suffocation from the sulphur; the fear of falling down through the crevices in the yawning ground; the stopping, every now and then, for somebody who is missing in the dark (for the dense smoke now obscures the moon); the intolerable noise of the thirty; and the hoarse roaring of the mountain; make it a scene of such confusion, at the same time, that we reel again. But, dragging the ladies through it, and across another exhausted crater to the foot of the present Volcano, we approach close to it on the windy side, and then sit down among the hot ashes at its foot, and look up in silence; faintly estimating the action that is going on within, from its being full a hundred feet higher, at this minute, than it was six weeks ago.

There is something in the fire and roar that generates an irresistible desire to get nearer to it. We cannot rest long without starting off, two of us, on our hands and knees, accompanied by the head guide, to climb to the brim of the flaming crater, and try to look in. Meanwhile, the thirty yell, as with one voice, that it is a dangerous proceeding, and call to us to come back; frightening the rest of the party out of their wits.

What with their noise, and what with the trembling of the thin crust of ground, that seems about to open underneath our feet, and plunge us in the burning gulf below (which is the real danger, if there be any); and what with the flashing of the fire in our faces, and the shower of red-hot ashes that is raining down, and the choking smoke and sulphur; we may well feel giddy and irrational, like drunken men. But, we contrive to climb up to the brim, and look down, for a moment, into the Hell of boiling fire below. Then, we all three come rolling down; blackened, and singed, and scorched, and hot, and giddy: and each with his dress alight in half-a-dozen places.

You have read, a thousand times, that the usual way of descending is by sliding down the ashes: which, forming a gradually increasing ledge below the feet, prevent too rapid a descent. But, when we have crossed the two exhausted craters on our way back, and are come to this precipitous place, there is (as Mr. Pickle has foretold) no vestige of ashes to be seen; the whole being a smooth sheet of ice.

In this dilemma, ten or a dozen of the guides cautiously join hands, and make a chain of men; of whom the foremost beat, as well as they can, a rough track with their sticks, down which we prepare to follow. The way being fearfully steep, and none of the party: even of the thirty: being able to keep their feet for six paces together, the ladies are taken out of their litters, and placed each between two careful persons; while others of the thirty hold by their skirts, to prevent their falling forward—a necessary precaution, tending to the immediate and hopeless dilapidation of their apparel. The rather heavy gentleman is adjured to leave his litter too, and be escorted in a similar manner; but he resolves to be brought down as he was brought up, on the principle that his fifteen bearers are not likely to tumble all at once, and that he is safer so than trusting to his own legs.

In this order, we begin the descent: sometimes on foot, sometimes shuffling on the ice: always proceeding much more quietly and slowly than on our upward way: and constantly alarmed by the falling among us of somebody from behind, who endangers the footing of the whole party, and clings pertinaciously to anybody's ankles. It is impossible for the litter to be in advance, too, as the track has to be made; and its appearance behind us, overhead—with some one or other of the bearers always down, and the rather heavy gentleman with his legs always in the air—is very threatening and frightful. We have gone on thus a very little way, painfully and anxiously, but quite merrily, and regarding it as a great success—and have all fallen several times, and have all been stopped, somehow or other, as we were sliding away—when Mr. Pickle, of Portici, in the act of remarking on these uncommon circumstances as quite beyond his experience, stumbles, falls, disengages himself, with quick presence of mind, from those about him, plunges away head foremost, and rolls, over and over, down the whole surface of the cone!

Sickening as it is to look, and be so powerless to help him, I see him there, in the moonlight—I have had such a dream often—skimming over the white ice like a cannon-ball. Almost at the same moment, there is a cry from behind; and a man who has carried a light basket of spare cloaks on his head, comes rolling past at the same frightful speed, closely followed by a boy. At this climax of the chapter of accidents, the

remaining eight-and-twenty vociferate to that degree, that a pack of wolves would be music to them!

Giddy, and bloody, and a mere bundle of rags, is Pickle of Portici when we reach the place where we dismounted, and where the horses are waiting; but, thank God, sound in limb! And never are we likely to be more glad to see a man alive, and on his feet, than to see him now—making light of it too, though sorely bruised and in great pain. The boy is brought into the Hermitage on the Mountain, while we are at supper, with his head tied up; and the man is heard of some hours afterwards. He, too, is bruised and stunned, but has broken no bones; the snow having, fortunately, covered all the larger blocks of rock and stone, and rendered them harmless.

After a cheerful meal, and a good rest before a blazing fire, we again take horse, and continue our descent to Salvatore's house—very slowly, by reason of our bruised friend being hardly able to keep the saddle, or endure the pain of motion. Though it is so late at night, or early in the morning, all the people of the village are waiting about the little stable-yard when we arrive, and looking up the road by which we are expected. Our appearance is hailed with a great clamour of tongues, and a general sensation for which, in our modesty, we are somewhat at a loss to account, until, turning into the yard, we find that one of a party of French gentlemen who were on the mountain at the same time is lying on some straw in the stable, with a broken limb: looking like Death, and suffering great torture; and that we were confidently supposed to have encountered some worse accident.

So "well returned, and Heaven be praised!" as the cheerful Vetturino, who has borne us company all the way from Pisa, says with all his heart! And away with his ready horses into sleeping Naples!

It wakes again to Policinelli and pickpockets, buffo singers and beggars, rags, puppets, flowers, brightness, dirt, and universal degradation; airing its Harlequin suit in the sunshine, next day and every day; singing, starving, dancing, gaming, on the seashore; and leaving all labour to the burning mountain, which is ever at its work.

Our English dilettanti would be very pathetic on the subject of the national taste, if they could hear an Italian opera half as badly sung in England as we may hear the *Foscari* performed, to-night, in the splendid theatre of San Carlo. But, for astonishing truth and spirit in seizing and embodying the real life about it, the shabby little San Carlino Theatre—the rickety house one story high, with a staring picture outside: down among the drums and trumpets, and the tumblers, and the lady conjurer—is without a rival anywhere.

There is one extraordinary feature in the real life of Naples, at which we may take a glance before we go—the Lotteries.

They prevail in most parts of Italy, but are particularly obvious, in their effects and influences, here. They are drawn every Saturday. They bring an immense revenue to the Government; and diffuse a taste for gambling among the poorest of the poor, which is very comfortable to the coffers of the state, and very ruinous to themselves. The lowest stake is one grain; less than a farthing. One hundred numbers—from one to a hundred, inclusive—are put into a box. Five are drawn. Those are the prizes. I buy three numbers. If one of them come up, I win a small prize. If two, some hundreds of times my stake. If three, three thousand five hundred times my stake. I stake (or play as they call it) what I can upon my numbers, and buy what numbers I please. The amount I play, I pay at the lottery office, where I purchase the ticket; and it is stated on the ticket itself.

Every lottery office keeps a printed book, an Universal Lottery Diviner, where every possible accident and circumstance is provided for, and has a number against it. For instance, let us stake two carlini—about sevenpence. On our way to the lottery office, we run against a black man. When we get there, we say gravely, "The Diviner." It is handed over the counter, as a serious matter of business. We look at black man. Such a number. "Give us that." We look at running against a person in the street. "Give us that." We look at the name of the street itself. "Give us that." Now, we have our three numbers.

If the roof of the theatre of San Carlo were to fall in, so many people would play upon the numbers attached to such an accident in the Diviner, that the Government would soon close those numbers, and decline to run the risk of losing any more upon them. This often happens. Not long ago, when there was a fire in the King's Palace, there was such a desperate run on fire, and king, and palace, that further stakes on the numbers attached to those words in the Golden Book were forbidden. Every accident or event is supposed, by the ignorant populace, to be a revelation to the beholder, or party concerned, in connection with the lottery. Certain people, who have a talent for dreaming fortunately, are much sought after, and there

are some priests who are constantly favoured with visions of the lucky numbers.

I heard of a horse running away with a man, and dashing him down dead at the corner of a street. Pursuing the horse with incredible speed was another man, who ran so fast, that he came up immediately after the accident. He threw himself upon his knees beside the unfortunate rider, and clasped his hand with an expression of the wildest grief. "If you have life," he said, "speak one word to me! If you have one gasp of breath left, mention your age for Heaven's sake, that I may play that number in the lottery."

It is four o'clock in the afternoon, and we may go to see our lottery drawn. The ceremony takes place every Saturday, in the Tribunale, or Court of Justice—this singular, earthy-smelling room, or gallery, as mouldy as an old cellar, and as damp as a dungeon. At the upper end is a platform, with a large horse-shoe table upon it; and a President and Council sitting round—all Judges of the Law. The man on the little stool behind the President is the Capo Lazzarone, a kind of tribune of the people, appointed on their behalf to see that all is fairly conducted: attended by a few personal friends. A ragged, swarthy fellow he is: with long, matted hair hanging down all over his face: and covered, from head to foot, with most unquestionably genuine dirt. All the body of the room is filled with the commonest of the Neapolitan people: and between them and the platform, guarding the steps leading to the latter, is a small body of soldiers.

There is some delay in the arrival of the necessary number of judges; during which, the box, in which the numbers are being placed, is a source of the deepest interest. When the box is full, the boy who is to draw the numbers out of it becomes the prominent feature of the proceedings. He is already dressed for his part, in a tight brown holland coat, with only one (the left) sleeve to it, which leaves his right arm bared to the shoulder, ready for plunging down into the mysterious chest.

During the hush and whisper that pervade the room, all eyes are turned on this young minister of fortune. People begin to inquire his age, with a view to the next lottery; and the number of his brothers and sisters; and the age of his father and mother; and whether he has any moles or pimples upon him; and where, and how many; when the arrival of the last judge but one (a little old man, universally dreaded as possessing the Evil Eye) makes a slight diversion, and would occasion a greater one, but that he is immediately deposed, as a source of interest, by the officiating priest, who advances gravely to his place, followed by a very dirty little boy, carrying his sacred vestments, and a pot of Holy Water.

Here is the last judge come at last, and now he takes his place at the horse-shoe table!

There is a murmur of irrepressible agitation. In the midst of it, the priest puts his head into the sacred vestments, and pulls the same over his shoulders. Then he says a silent prayer; and dipping a brush into the pot of Holy Water, sprinkles it over the box and over the boy, and gives them a double-barrelled blessing, which the box and the boy are both hoisted on the table to receive. The boy remaining on the table, the box is now carried round the front of the platform by an attendant, who holds it up and shakes it lustily all the time; seeming to say, like the conjurer, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; keep your eyes upon me, if you please!"

At last the box is set before the boy; and the boy, first holding up his naked arm and open hand, dives down into the hole (it is made like a ballot-box) and pulls out a number, which is rolled up, round something hard, like a bonbon. This he hands to the judge next him, who unrolls a little bit, and hands it to the President, next to whom he sits. The President unrolls it very slowly. The Capo Lazzarone leans over his shoulder. The President holds it up, unrolled, to the Capo Lazzarone. The Capo Lazzarone, looking at it eagerly, cries out, in a shrill, loud voice, "Sessanta-due!" (sixty-two), expressing the two upon his fingers, as he calls it out. Alas! the Capo Lazzarone himself has not staked on sixty-two. His face is very long, and his eyes roll wildly.

As it happens to be a favourite number, however, it is pretty well received, which is not always the case. They are all drawn with the same ceremony, omitting the blessing. One blessing is enough for the whole multiplication table. The only new incident in the proceedings is the gradually deepening intensity of the change in the Capo Lazzarone, who has, evidently, speculated to the very utmost extent of his means; and who, when he sees the last number, and finds that it is not one of his, clasps his hands, and raises his eyes to the ceiling before proclaiming it, as though remonstrating, in a secret agony, with his patron saint, for having committed so gross a breach of confidence. I hope the Capo Lazzarone may not desert him for some other member of the Calendar, but he seems to threaten it.

Where the winners may be, nobody knows. They certainly are not present; the general disappointment filling one with pity for the poor people. They look: when we stand aside, observing them in their passage through the courtyard down below: as miserable as the prisoners in the gaol (it forms a part of the building), who are peeping down upon them, from between their bars; or, as the fragments of human heads which are still dangling in chains outside, in memory of the good old times, when their owners were strung up there for the popular edification.

Away from Naples in a glorious sunrise, by the road to Capua, and then on a three days' journey along by-roads, that we may see, on the way, the monastery of Monte Cassino, which is perched on the steep and lofty hill above the little town of San Germano, and is lost on a misty morning in the clouds.

So much the better for the deep sounding of its bell, which, as we go winding up, on mules, towards the convent, is heard mysteriously in the still air, while nothing is seen but the grey mist, moving solemnly and slowly, like a funeral procession. Behold, at length, the shadowy pile of building close before us: its grey walls and towers dimly seen, though so near and so vast: and the raw vapour rolling through its cloisters heavily.

There are two black shadows walking to and fro in the quadrangle, near the statues of the Patron Saint and his sister; and hopping on behind them, in and out of the old arches, is a raven, croaking in answer to the bell, and uttering, at intervals, the purest Tuscan. How like a Jesuit he looks! There never was a sly and stealthy fellow so at home as is this raven, standing now at the refectory door, with his head on one side, and pretending to glance another way, while he is scrutinising the visitors keenly, and listening with fixed attention. What a dull-headed monk the porter becomes in comparison!

"He speaks like us!" says the porter: "quite as plainly." Quite as plainly, Porter. Nothing could be more expressive than his reception of the peasants who are entering the gate with baskets and burdens. There is a roll in his eye, and a chuckle in his throat, which should qualify him to be chosen Superior of an Order of Ravens. He knows all about it. "It's all right," he says. "We know what we know. Come along, good people. Glad to see you!"

How was this extraordinary structure ever built in such a situation, where the labour of conveying the stone, and iron, and marble so great a height must have been prodigious? "Caw!" says the raven, welcoming the peasants. How, being despoiled by plunder, fire, and earthquake, has it risen from its ruins, and been again made what we now see it, with its church so sumptuous and magnificent? "Caw!" says the raven, welcoming the peasants. These people have a miserable appearance, and (as usual) are densely ignorant, and all beg while the monks are chanting in the chapel. "Caw!" says the raven. "Cuckoo!"

So we leave him, chuckling and rolling his eye at the convent gate, and wind slowly down again through the cloud. At last, emerging from it, we come in sight of the village far below, and the flat, green country intersected by rivulets; which is pleasant and fresh to see after the obscurity and haze of the convent—no disrespect to the raven, or the holy friars.

Away we go again, by muddy roads, and through the most shattered and tattered of villages, where there is not a whole window among all the houses, or a whole garment among all the peasants, or the least appearance of anything to eat in any of the wretched hucksters' shops. The women wear a bright red bodice laced before and behind, a white skirt, and the Neapolitan head-dress of square folds of linen, primitively meant to carry loads on. The men and children wear anything they can get. The soldiers are as dirty and rapacious as the dogs. The inns are such hobgoblin places, that they are infinitely more attractive and amusing than the best hotels in Paris. Here is one near Valmontone (that is Valmontone, the round, walled town on the mount opposite), which is approached by a quagmire almost knee deep. There is a wild colonnade below, and a dark yard full of empty stables and lofts, and a great long kitchen with a great long bench and a great long form, where a party of travellers, with two priests among them, are crowding round the fire while their supper is cooking. Above-stairs is a rough brick gallery to sit in, with very little windows with very small patches of knotty glass in them, and all the doors that open from it (a dozen or two) off their hinges, and a bare board on trestles for a table, at which thirty people might dine easily, and a fire-place large enough in itself for a breakfast parlour, where, as the faggots blaze and crackle, they illuminate the ugliest and grimmest of faces, drawn in charcoal on the whitewashed chimney-sides by previous travellers. There is a flaring country lamp on the table; and, hovering about it, scratching her thick black hair continually, a yellow dwarf of a woman, who stands on tiptoe to arrange the

hatchet knives, and takes a flying leap to look into the water jug. The beds in the adjoining rooms are of the liveliest kind. There is not a solitary scrap of looking-glass in the house, and the washing apparatus is identical with the cooking utensils. But the yellow dwarf sets on the table a good flask of excellent wine, holding a quart at least; and produces, among half-a-dozen other dishes, two-thirds of a roasted kid, smoking hot. She is as good-humoured, too, as dirty, which is saying a great deal. So here's long life to her in the flask of wine, and prosperity to the establishment.

Rome gained and left behind, and with it the Pilgrims who are now repairing to their own homes again—each with his scallop shell and staff, and soliciting alms for the love of God—we come, by a fair country, to the Falls of Terni, where the whole Velino River dashes, headlong, from a rocky height, amidst shining spray and rainbows. Perugia, strongly fortified by art and nature, on a lofty eminence, rising abruptly from the plain where purple mountains mingle with the distant sky, is glowing, on its market-day, with radiant colours. They set off its sombre but rich Gothic buildings admirably. The pavement of its market-place is strewn with country goods. All along the steep hill leading from the town, under the town wall, there is a noisy fair of calves, lambs, pigs, horses, mules, and oxen. Fowls, geese, and turkeys flutter vigorously among their very hoofs; and buyers, sellers, and spectators, clustering everywhere, block up the road as we come shouting down upon them.

Suddenly there is a ringing sound among our horses. The driver stops them. Sinking in his saddle, and casting up his eyes to Heaven, he delivers this apostrophe, "Oh, Jove Omnipotent! here is a horse has lost his shoe!"

Notwithstanding the tremendous nature of this accident, and the utterly forlorn look and gesture (impossible in any one but an Italian Vetturino) with which it is announced, it is not long in being repaired by a mortal Farrier, by whose assistance we reach Castiglione the same night, and Arezzo next day. Mass is, of course, performing in its fine cathedral, where the sun shines in among the clustered pillars, through rich stained-glass windows: half revealing, half concealing the kneeling figures on the pavement, and striking out paths of spotted light in the long aisles.

But, how much beauty of another kind is here, when, on a fair, clear morning, we look, from the summit of a hill, on Florence! See where it lies before us in a sun-lighted valley, bright with the winding Arno, and shut in by swelling hills; its domes, and towers, and palaces rising from the rich country in a glittering heap, and shining in the sun like gold!

Magnificently stern and sombre are the streets of beautiful Florence; and the strong old piles of building make such heaps of shadow, on the ground and in the river, that there is another and a different city of rich forms and fancies always lying at our feet. Prodigious palaces, constructed for defence, with small distrustful windows heavily barred, and walls of great thickness formed of huge masses of rough stone, frown, in their old sulky state, on every street. In the midst of the city—in the Piazza of the Grand Duke, adorned with beautiful statues and the Fountain of Neptune—rises the Palazzo Vecchio, with its enormous overhanging battlements, and the Great Tower that watches over the whole town. In its courtyard—worthy of the Castle of Otranto in its ponderous gloom—is a massive staircase that the heaviest waggon and the stoutest team of horses might be driven up. Within it is a Great Saloon, faded and tarnished in its stately decorations, and mouldering by grains, but recording yet, in pictures on its walls, the triumphs of the Medici and the wars of the old Florentine people. The prison is hard by, in an adjacent courtyard of the building—a foul and dismal place, where some men are shut up close, in small cells like ovens; and where others look through bars and beg; where some are playing draughts, and some are talking to their friends, who smoke, the while, to purify the air; and some are buying wine and fruit of women vendors; and all are squalid, dirty, and vile to look at. "They are merry enough, Signore," says the gaoler. "They are all blood-stained here," he adds, indicating, with his hand, three-fourths of the whole building. Before the hour is out, an old man, eighty years of age, quarrelling over a bargain with a young girl of seventeen, stabs her dead in the market-place full of bright flowers; and is brought in prisoner, to swell the number.

Among the four old bridges that span the river, the Ponte Vecchio—that bridge which is covered with the shops of Jewellers and Goldsmiths—is a most enchanting feature in the scene. The space of one house, in the centre, being left open, the view beyond is shown as in a frame; and that precious glimpse of sky, and water, and rich buildings, shining so quietly among the huddled roofs and gables on the bridge, is exquisite. Above it, the Gallery of

the Grand Duke crosses the river. It was built to connect the two Great Palaces by a secret passage; and it takes its jealous course among the streets and houses with true despotism: going where it lists, and spurning every obstacle away before it.

The Grand Duke has a worthier secret passage through the streets, in his black robe and hood, as a member of the Compagnia della Misericordia, which brotherhood includes all ranks of men. If an accident take place, their office is to raise the sufferer, and bear him tenderly to the Hospital. If a fire break out, it is one of their functions to repair to the spot, and render their assistance and protection. It is, also, among their commonest offices to attend and console the sick; and they neither receive money, nor eat, nor drink in any house they visit for this purpose. Those who are on duty for the time are called together, on a moment's notice, by the tolling of the great bell of the Tower; and it is said that the Grand Duke has been seen, at this sound, to rise from his seat at table, and quietly withdraw to attend the summons.

In this other large Piazza, where an irregular kind of market is held, and stores of old iron and other small merchandise are set out on stalls, or scattered on the pavement, are grouped together the Cathedral with its great Dome, the beautiful Italian Gothic Tower the Campanile, and the Baptistery with its wrought-bronze doors. And here, a small untrodden square in the pavement, is "the Stone of DANTE," where (so runs the story) he was used to bring his stool, and sit in contemplation. I wonder was he ever, in his bitter exile, withheld from cursing the very stones in the streets of Florence the ungrateful, by any kind remembrance of this old musing-place, and its association with gentle thoughts of little Beatrice!

The Chapel of the Medici, the Good and Bad Angels of Florence; the Church of Santa Croce, where Michael Angelo lies buried, and where every stone in the cloisters is eloquent on great men's deaths; innumerable churches, often masses of unfinished, heavy brickwork externally, but solemn and serene within; arrest our lingering steps, in strolling through the city.

In keeping with the tombs among the cloisters is the Museum of Natural History, famous through the world for its preparations in wax; beginning with models of leaves, seeds, plants, inferior animals; and gradually ascending, through separate organs of the human frame, up to the whole structure of that wonderful creation, exquisitely presented, as in recent death. Few admonitions of our frail mortality can be more solemn and more sad, or strike so home upon the heart, as the counterfeits of Youth and Beauty that are lying there, upon their beds, in their last sleep.

Beyond the walls, the whole sweet Valley of the Arno, the Convent at Fiesole, the Tower of Galileo, BOCCACCIO'S house, old villas and retreats; innumerable spots of interest, all glowing in a landscape of surpassing beauty steeped in the richest light; are spread before us. Returning from so much brightness, how solemn and how grand the streets again, with their great, dark, mournful palaces, and many legends: not of siege, and war, and might, and Iron Hand alone, but of the triumphant growth of peaceful Arts and Sciences.

What light is shed upon the world, at this day, from amidst these rugged Palaces of Florence! Here, open to all comers, in their beautiful and calm retreats, the ancient sculptors are immortal, side by side with Michael Angelo, Canova, Titian, Rembrandt, Raphael, Poets, Historians, Philosophers—those illustrious men of history, beside whom its crowned heads and harnessed warriors show so poor and small, and are so soon forgotten. Here the imperishable part of noble mind survives, placid and equal, when strongholds of assault and defence are overthrown; when the tyranny of the many, or the few, or both, is but a tale; when Pride and Power are so much cloistered dust. The fire within the stern streets, and among the massive Palaces and Towers, kindled by rays from Heaven, is still burning brightly, when the flickering of war is extinguished and the household fires of generations have decayed; as thousands upon thousands of faces, rigid with the strife and passion of the hour, have faded out of the old Squares and public haunts, while the nameless Florentine Lady, preserved from oblivion by a Painter's hand, yet lives on, in enduring grace and youth.

Let us look back on Florence while we may, and when its shining Dome is seen no more, go travelling through cheerful Tuscany, with a bright remembrance of it; for Italy will be the fairer for the recollection. The summer-time being come; and Genoa, and Milan, and the Lake of Como lying far behind us: and we resting at Faido, a Swiss village, near the awful rocks and mountains, the everlasting snows and roaring cataracts, of the Great Saint Gothard: hearing the Italian tongue for the last time on the journey: let us part from Italy, with all its miseries and wrongs, affectionately, in our admiration of the beauties, natural and artificial, of

which it is full to overflowing, and in our tenderness towards a people, naturally well disposed, and patient, and sweet-tempered. Years of neglect, oppression, and misrule have been at work, to change their nature and reduce their spirit; miserable jealousies, fomented by petty Princes to whom union was destruction, and division strength, have been a canker at the root of their nationality, and have barbarised their language; but the good that was in them ever, is in them yet, and a noble people may be, one day, raised up from these ashes. Let us entertain that hope! And let us not remember Italy the less regardfully, because, in every fragment of her fallen temples, and every stone of her deserted palaces and prisons, she helps to inculcate the lesson that the wheel of Time is rolling for an end, and that the world is, in all great essentials, better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful as it rolls!

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